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No. 93
August 2002

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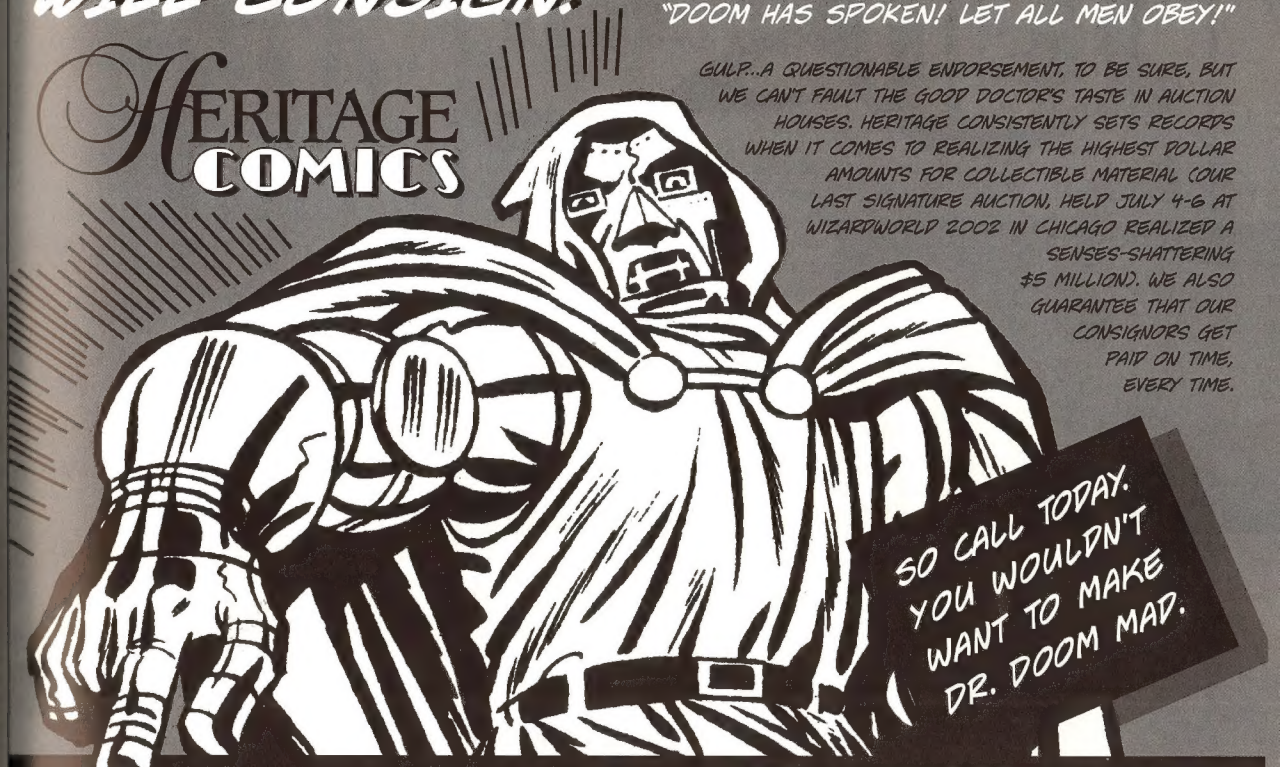

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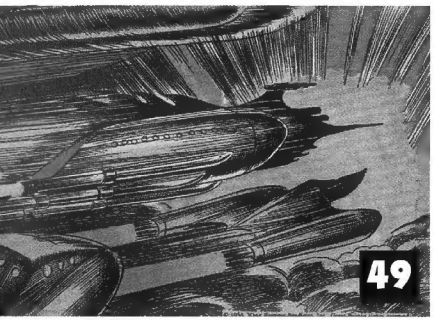

Flash Gordon art © 2002 KFS

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David Berg

Comic book artist and writer, born June 12, 1920, died May 17, 2002.

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by Paul Gravett

The American comic book artist and writer David Berg has died of cancer at the age of 81. He worked on several major characters and in various genres before joining *MAD* magazine, where for more than forty years he satirized the foibles of suburban America in "The Lighter Side" in the monthly magazine and in numerous paperbacks.

Born in Brooklyn in 1920, Berg showed an early talent for drawing, which led him to study at The Pratt Institute, Cooper Union and other New York art schools. Arriving for his first day as a professional comic book artist in 1941, Berg was nearly sent home immediately, because his boss, young entrepreneur Will Eisner, had filled his apartment-cum-studio with artists, even cramming them into the kitchen, and had no more room for him. But Eisner, under pressure, needed Berg, so he cleared a corner, had a drawing table delivered, and set him to work.

Berg assisted on backgrounds for Eisner's moody noir newspaper strip *The Spirit* and he was soon packaging complete comic book episodes of patriotic heroes Uncle Sam and Death Patrol. Berg never forgot Eisner's encouragement: "You're not a cartoonist, you're the director, the actor, the set-designer...the whole motion picture is you!"

Before he went off to war, he wrote and drew America's biggest-selling superhero, Fawcett Comics' Captain Marvel. If other artists were struggling to draw an awkward shot of the character, Berg, who was well built, would take off his shirt and strike the appropriate pose. Also for Fawcett he drew the charming "Sir Butch," about a Brooklyn boy transformed into a brave knight in a fantastical realm when he falls down a manhole.

After serving in the Air Force and as a war correspondent in Iwo Jima, Guam, Saipan and Japan, Berg resumed his work for Eisner, now helping to pencil *The Spirit* and co-writing it with Jules Feiffer. Later, he drew for Archie Comics, and for Stan Lee at Marvel he produced horror, teenage humor, and for five years the commie-bashing G.I. Combat Kelly.

In 1956, Berg began contributing to *MAD*, an association that would last the rest of his life. One evening he screened some comedy home movies he had scripted and filmed starring his family and neighbors for *MAD* editor Al Feldstein, who suggested that he adapt the idea into comics for the magazine. In "The Lighter Side" starting in 1961, he satirized ordinary Middle American life by exploring a different topic each month, from Little League baseball to car maintenance, and, with ideas from his wife Vivian, also a cartoonist, and from their children and friends, he turned them into perceptive vignettes of human nature.

It was Feldstein who insisted that, if Berg was going to laugh at people, he should show that he was no better and put himself in the feature. Berg's alter-ego in his large, black, outdated glasses, pipe and sports jacket was the cranky, flawed liberal Roger Kaputnik, a joke name he had given himself as a child from a large family, when his mother could not always remember all of her children's names.

For four decades, 'Berg's-Eye View' surveyed the issues of race, class, sex and day-to-day living in American society with his elegant, observant artwork and a subtle self-mockery of the 'newly arrived' middle classes Berg knew so well. As Berg once explained, " 'The Lighter Side'...was more than just gags, it was a psychological and sociological study of the human condition, and truth in humor."

As well as his magazine work, he wrote and illustrated seventeen books for *MAD* (such as *MAD's Dave Berg Looks at the USA)*, which have sold over ten million copies and have been translated into a dozen languages. His humorous university lectures on religious themes were collected into two books, *My Friend God* and *Roger Kaputnik and God*. His final "Lighter Side" panels are scheduled for the September issue of *MAD*, marking the magazine's 50th anniversary. He is survived by his wife and two children.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

That's what makes horse races

This issue we throw the *CBM* spotlight on Alex Raymond, the wonderful artist who created the comic strips *Flash Gordon*, *Jungle Jim*, *Secret Agent X-9* and *Rip Kirby*. That's quite an accomplishment, to have created four very successful and popular strips which ran in the newspapers for nearly 70 years.

And as Bob Harvey points out so eloquently in his column in this issue, Alex Raymond was not truly a cartoonist. He was a magnificent illustrator who just happened to be famous because of his work in the comics medium. And what work that was! Never one to stand still, Raymond's artistic style changed continually over the years, starting with a very flat and cartoony style and progressing through a flowing illustrational style, finally to settle on a clean and well-balanced (and very Hal Fosterish) way of inking. Yet Raymond was never satisfied with being a comic artist, always aspiring to do "more important" illustrations in books and magazines of the day. You can see the influence of this desire in his *Flash Gordon* Sunday page originals from 1935-1937 especially.

As a youngster growing up in Missouri, I was not a fan of *Flash Gordon*. At my house we got the Springfield *News-Leader*, with Sunday strips from United Features Syndicate and NEA. But when I would walk the two blocks to my grandfather Cochran's house, where he subscribed to the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch*, I could read *Flash Gordon*, *Prince Valiant*, *Bringing Up Father* and all the other classic King Features comics. And as a five-year-old kid, I wasn't interested in the lovely drawing of Raymond and Foster, preferring to read strips like *Li'l Abner*, *Alley Oop* and *Dick Tracy*.

But then many years later, as I started to get into comics fandom in the late 1960s, I stumbled upon a treasure trove—a ten-year run of the comic section from the Sunday Des Moines *Register-Tribune*, which carried *Flash Gordon*, *Buck Rogers*, *Tarzan*, *Tailspin Tommy*, *Thimble Theater* and many others. These sections, from about 1933 through 1943, opened my eyes to just how great the comic sections were at this time, and I became a Raymond fan.

Soon after that, I started buying and selling original comic strip artwork, and it was always frustrating because it was very difficult to find any *Flash Gordon* originals from the middle 1930s—they were practically non-existent. But through a few strokes of luck.... One time when I was visiting Bill Gaines in New York, I learned that Alex's brother worked at Cartier and went to see him. He gave me the phone number of Alex's widow, and over the next few years and many visits to her home in Connecticut, we became friends. We would go out to dinner and I would ask questions about Alex, about how he worked, and eventually I ended up purchasing a large number of originals from her and her son.

During this period I thought Raymond was the best there was—better even than Hal Foster. Since then, I have revised that opinion. I now prefer Foster to Raymond. Both were fabulous, and Raymond may have been a superior illustrator, but I now think Foster was the greater artist, and that Foster's *Tarzan* Sunday pages from 1932-1935 were his very best work. It's funny how your tastes can change and evolve over a period of many years. But, "to each his own," whether you prefer Foster or Raymond, Jack Kirby or Will Eisner, Wally Wood or Graham Ingels, that's what makes our world go 'round!

Russ

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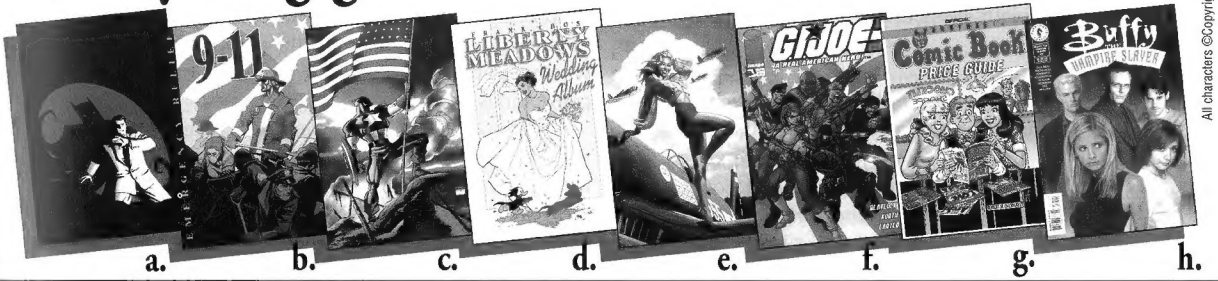
a. A Dark Knight detective driven by vengeance. **b.** A story of tragedy overcome by true heroism. **c.** The embodiment of American ideals. **d.** A wedding with at least one unknown participant. **e.** High-flying adventure with a patriotic flair. **f.** Defenders of freedom and justice. **g.** An ageless all-American teen. **h.** A young girl turned savior of the innocent.



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MARKETPLACE MAIL

Attention:

CBM *readers! I recently received the following letter from Joe Tucker, whose father, Lt. Lawrence K. Tucker, was featured in an issue of* True Comics *or possibly* Real Heroes. *He wants to locate a copy of this comic book that featured his dad. Can you help?*

Russ Cochran

How can I find a copy or obtain a reproduction of a comic issue having an article about my dad in WWII? A nephew of my grandmother sent her one. Don't know what year. Think it could be a *True Comics* issue or *True War Stories*? *Real Heroes*? *American Heroes*? Would have an article about Lt. Lawrence K. Tucker during WWII and may have been published around 1943 through 1945 or maybe even up to the early '50s.

Additional Info: Lt. Lawrence K. Tucker, 45th. Inf. Div. 157th Inf. Reg. 1st Btn. Co. A & 2nd. Btn. Co. E. Was platoon leader as well as Co. Commander. Sicily (Battle of Bloody Ridge) article for newspapers at home done by Harold Boyle in 1943, I have newspaper articles of that, he was also in Salerno landing (Naples-Foggia, Anzio, Rome-Arno; Invasion of So. France). Could have been any of above. Thanks,

Joe Tucker
ofcprod@bellsouth.net

I have a 1964 issue of *Journey into Mystery* "With The Mighty Thor, Featuring the Menace of Magneto" and I have yet to find one that is just like it. On the front where the price should be it has "9d" instead of 12¢ and under that in a different box it has "109." All the others I have found have "Oct 109" in the box . Any information you can give me is greatly needed. Thanks,

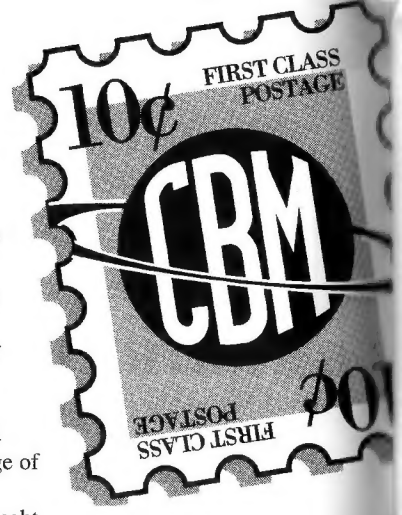
chromium2@redsmvp.com

First thought, this is the English/British edition of JIM *109 (Oct 64), with the same contents as the American edition ("with" Thor and "featuring" Magneto, only a few issues prior it would have "featured" Thor) it would be the first crossover appearance of Magneto. Possibly it was released after October in England, or British covers may not have listed a month. In Britain, a "d" is a penny, a small denomination coin—9d was the price. The geography of the boxes jive with the American edition.*

Ed Rock

The Flame-Keeper

You've always been the ultimate keeper of the EC flame with your reprint comics and box sets, so it was no surprise to me that the Johnny Craig tribute in *CBM* #91 was well-executed and informative, with lots of great pictures.



Still, one thing in your editorial made me want to tell this story I recently heard. You said that Craig didn't do conventions. While it's true he did very few, he did appear at the 1972 EC Fan-Addict Convention, I believe, and recently I purchased a page of Craig art from *Vault Of Horror* #40. The guy I bought it from said that the dealer from whom he had originally purchased the page told him a story about Craig appearing at a convention in Buffalo only a few years ago. Now this is hearsay. I have no way of substantiating this anecdote, but I was told that no one was coming up to Craig for most of the time he was at the con. Had I known about the con, I would have been there and spent hours talking to him until security guards dragged me off kicking and screaming! How could a legend like Craig be lonely and have no lineup of fans waiting to ask questions and get books signed?! This was very sad to hear.

George Evans told me he did a signing with Craig at a comic shop somewhere in Pennsylvania, the state where both lived. In fact a friend and I had long ago made plans to phone Johnny Craig and see if he would permit us to visit him, get some things signed and see his studio (which I HAD done with George Evans, and it was an inspiring visit), but sadly we never got around to it.

So Craig WAS sometimes accessible to fans, but if the turnout is dismal, if no one at these cons seems to know who he is and don't care, why would he want to do more conventions?

So come on, Golden Age fans, horror fans, EC fans. Go and see the old timers when they appear at cons. Even if they're not your favorites, let them know you know who they are, that you like their work, talk to them and give them some respect and praise. They want to hear it. These people often didn't get much respect at the time they were doing the work (luckily Bill Gaines DID give EC artists respect and praise, but some other publishers were not so nice).

Great issue, Russ. Keep up the good work.

Paul Wardle
via e-mail

Amen and A-men, brother! Thank you, Paul!

RC

Craves more Craig

CBM #91 had a surprisingly shallow report on Johnny Craig. The author normally writes wonderfully, so I can only assume he was rushed, for the article was poorly researched. A simple check on the Grand Comics Database would show that Craig began inking Colan at Marvel for *Tales of Suspense*, March 1968, not *Ironman* and *Submariner*, April 1968, as cited. A small difference, but more importantly he did at least ten DC horror stories from 1978-82, although your article cites only four stories.

I am a big supporter of your zine, and an admirer of Mr. Hill's writing skills. Somehow this one went south. I'm sure you'll all be back on track next time.

I was greatly disappointed in your *graphic* coverage of Johnny Craig's career, as well. You reprinted almost no art beyond his EC work. You produced one postage stamp-sized image from a Marvel mystery story (which was actually heavily touched up by Romita, so it wasn't even really Craig's work!), which overlooks about five years of work on *Ironman*, first inking Gene Colan, then penciling and inking by himself—and this showed the breadth of his skill as he was able to convincingly assume the Marvel/Kirby house style. And for about five years *before* Marvel, Craig sporadically produced stories for ACG, and though the house style there was almost painfully bland, ACG did win fan awards, year after year, for best fantasy comics (even in competition against DC and Marvel)—yet you printed nothing from this era. Additionally, Craig worked on a number of projects at DC in the '80s, including some EC-style horror stories. Marvel had forced Craig to make his horror work look like Kirby, but DC let him do his thing. Yet there was *no* DC art shown—despite the fact that it easily matched the quality of the majority of his EC work.

Hang in there, gang—I'm still a big fan, so I pray you aren't too dismayed by my avalanche of criticisms.

I *loved* the Harry "A" Chesler story, by the way, but your explanation of why he used "A" as a middle initial is only half-true. The real reason was that he wanted a middle initial in his byline because he thought it looked impressive—but he was so illiterate that he added quote marks around the "A" thinking that would make it appear even *more* impressive.

Lincoln Yaco
via e-mail

Well, Good Lord! The subtitle of the article was "An EC Icon," no matter what Johnny Craig did in his later career it was the EC Johnny Craig that we wanted to talk about. Thanks for the additional Craig info.

RC

Our desire: no secrets

After reading Scott Shaw's "Oddball Comics" in the April 2002 issue of *Comic Book Marketplace*, #90, I realized that I had seen that cover before. When Fox closed its doors in 1951, Charlton inherited some Fox material. (Most notably *Blue Beetle*. Charlton also reprinted *Range Busters*.) An additional oddball Factoid: The cover of *True Life Secrets* #23 first appeared as the cover of Fox's *My Desire* #4, April 1950.

Willie Williams
North Augusta, SC

And remember—all our Factoids (literally 'things which resemble facts') resemble facts because they are facts themselves, even though they are facts about works of fiction! Thus barely missing being Fictoids.

ER

Dynamic punch

Just wanted to tell you what a great job you are doing with *CBM*. Just loved Jon Berk's piece on Harry Chesler. It's about time these books got some limelight other than the *Punch* #12 cover. I loved seeing the *Dynamic* #8 cover used—it was one of Ricca's best along with *Punch* #9. Just keep them coming. Your devoted reader,

John Vienne
via e-mail

This letter is a plant

The extra color pages this issue [*CBM* #91] *really* put things over the top for me. Whereas normally the comics discussed in articles end up in a color section in a remote part of the magazine—with the Chesler article it was far more immediate and interesting to have the art and covers discussed right there, complete with informative blurbs.

Great job on both Jon Berk's and Michael Kronenberg's part—I really hope you keep this kind of quality work up. I now know a lot more about Chesler and, as bad as some books were, I can appreciate them more.

The Johnny Craig piece was also very good, though you really jumped right over his New Direction work. As you were auctioning off work from that era, and I was actively bidding on it, I studied his work from the later New Trend titles like *Vault*, as well as *Extra!* and the New Direction titles. I came to appreciate Craig's masterful work *far* more than ever before. His work on *Extra!*, one of the most belittled EC titles, and particularly the Picto-Fiction magazines, was some of the finest from the last couple years of EC comics.

Also greatly enjoyed the Watterson article—I've always known next to nothing about him, aside from his brilliant cartooning. Best,

Bud Plant
Grass Valley, CA

Bud Plant! You mean—THE Bud Plant?! You actually read CBM*? Actually, Bud and I have been good friends for over 30 years, and I always take his comments seriously and consider him to be a really astute observer of the comics scene. Thanks, Bud! All kidding aside, I appreciate your input!*

RC

No pest strips

I like *Calvin & Hobbes*. Really. One of the best daily strips ever. Funny as hell.

But there should not be four pages devoted to them in *CBM* (# 91). This is a comic book magazine, not comic strips. Start a sister magazine or something for them. But I still vote for zero coverage of strips that have no more than a superficial relationship to comic books. Thanks,

Stu Cathell
Kenmore, WA

Well, you're outvoted, Stu! Or over-ruled. ALL comic strips have more than a superficial relationship to comic books. Name one that doesn't!

RC

Shark bait

Well, your fine publication, I'm sorry to say, has officially "jumped the shark" as far as I'm concerned. As a reader, as a fan and as a retailer, all I can say is that the decision to feature *Deadpool* as cover B for *CBM* #93 is practically a sign of the Apocalypse. No, no, no, thousand times no.

The character is a perfect example of what's wrong with today's Modern Age of Comics. (Speaking of which, I see that the Gold, Silver and Bronze banner is no longer a part of the masthead, at least as of *CBM* #89. Does this mean that other characters of *Deadpool*'s ilk are in the offing? I hope not.) The only connection to nostalgia or history he may have is the fact that Gail Simone was also slated to write a new *Night Nurse* mini series for Marvel. However, since that mini has been shelved, even that tenuous link no longer applies. So, please, please, please spare us, and *CBM* from the sheer indignity of seeing the Merc with the Mouth in the pages (or even cover) of one of my favorite magazines.

The good news is that all of my *CBM* people told me they wanted the Alex Raymond cover A. (As if I had to ask.) For shame, sir. :-)

Bruno Andreacchi
B.A.'s Comics
London ON

We done went and jumped the shark! It's not the first time and probably won't be the last. So good Night Nurse, we're all headed for Hell on a sled! Enjoy the ride!

RC

Yikes!

I always look forward to receiving the next issue of *CBM* in the mail. *CBM* has always been a super source of information for comic collectors and dealers. Online dealing and auctions are rapidly growing and becoming bigger and bigger every day it seems. Ebay sales on many key CGC books are bringing amazing prices. In fact, I recently saw an *Amazing Spider-Man* #121 CGC 9.8 close on eBay for an earth shattering $5,200. Yikes! is all I can say.

I liked "Market" reporter Michael Naiman's mention of the Mark Jewelers ad inserts found inside Marvel and DC comics, and would one believe there is yet another type of jewelry sales ad to be found that appeared in Marvel comics from a company called National Sales, which was produced on slick paper and ran four pages in the comics? *Monsters on the Prowl* #13 and *Marvel Premiere* #7 are two examples of this type of ad I have seen so far. Keep up the good work.

Bill Alexander
Nevada

Never reads "The Market"

Really enjoyed issue 91. Johnny Craig was truly a master artist and my one regret was that a few more pages couldn't have been freed up to further the tribute. One question remains: Will the Picto-Fiction line be added to the *EC Library* in the foreseeable future (in one form or another)? It would be quite a welcome addition.

The Chesler Studio was an interesting article as I was unfamiliar with it and, for me, it was a pleasant education of sorts.

The rest of the issue, especially the last half, dealt a little too much with statues, future comic/movie features and "New & Noteworthy" comics for my liking. I would run these articles (don't get me wrong) just not in the same issue. The "Market" section at the back of the book has to draw the short straw, five-and-a-half pages (around) that I never read and, in an 80-page publication, is too much and

too frequent. Last, bring back the coming next issue ad—I miss it.

Mike Egan
via email

Yes, we are working on the Picto-Fiction EC books now, and they should be published by Gemstone in the near future.

RC

ALways reads "The Market"

I have written to you once before, the letter never saw print and that is fine, I just hope you read all the mail you get. I was going to make this a long letter covering the basics of *Comic Book Marketplace* to give you my ten cents as to what I feel you are doing right and what is definitely wrong.

It has become more evident to me that you are producing a book that you have an interest in and to hell with the masses! I just finished issue 91 and I will say thank you for the extra color pages. I think everyone wants to see more color covers of older/harder to find books and I am sure it is appreciated by all. The article(s) on Johnny Craig were fantastic but took up *way too much* of the issue. Again Pat Calhoun's article was simply a summation of certain issues. I have an issue of *Shock SuspensStories* #1 in Good+ and I already know what's inside it! Why, why, why does he continue to do issue summations? Can't you talk to him, or do you even care?

I have been a faithful reader since issue #65 (I have them all) and it is sad to say that I think I'm all but done. You call yourself the *Comic Book MARKETPLACE* but issue after issue the market reports are smaller and smaller. Why not just try to stick to ten pages of market reports day in and day out? How many people have to complain before you start to listen? Do you care what anyone thinks? I for one don't think you do. I'm really sorry to sound like such a tyrant here Russ, I'm only 28 and this magazine is

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something I really look forward to month in and month out. It just amazes me to read the "Marketplace Mail" every issue and plainly see in black and white what the people want, but it never changes.

Anyway, I'm rambling. I'm not going to buy the magazine again until changes are made so you've lost one customer for sure north of the border. I guess I'll go back to reading *Wizard*, the mag I love to hate. I will check in every now and then to see if you've decided to make some changes but I guess it is true you can't teach an old dog new tricks. Good luck to you, Russ,

Frustrated in Canada

Are you calling me an old dog? Well, that's OK...I will accept the compliment graciously. Some of my best friends are old dogs, and old dogs have a lot to offer the world. So the next time you see an old dog, just walk up to him and get a conversation going. You might be surprised at how much he can tell you! And if you really think that I am just "producing a magazine that I am interested in, and to hell with the masses"...well...

RC

Two more countries heard from

Hello from upstate New York on a hot and humid Fourth of July. I am a long-time comic collector of '50s and '60s comics. I appreciate your magazine a great deal because so much of what I now know about the history of comics I have learned over the last few years from *Comic Book Marketplace*. For several years I bought your magazine from local comic book stores but about a year and a half ago my girlfriend got me a subscription. Unfortunately (for me) this was just at the time when Gary left and publication was suspended. I was panicked and very much relieved when copies started arriving a few months later.

I thought, as maybe a typical reader, I would comment briefly on the current magazine's content. I mostly like what you offer. I hope the things I do not read are attracting a wider following so the magazine can continue to be published. My favorite parts continue (from Gary's editorship) to be Michelle Nolan's and Pat Calhoun's columns about comics from the '50s. I do value the "Market Reports," although not as much as before I could follow eBay pricing trends. I am slowly losing interest in Michael Naiman's editorials. "Marketplace Mail" is one of the first things I look through since there is usually something very neat in it. Just so you know I do not read: "New and Noteworthy," "Collectable Character Statues" or "Comics2Film Digest." I only mention this because I used to read every single syllable of *CBM* and it feels strange not to.

I do appreciate your emphasis on '50s comics and artists. I would like to see articles on the careers of Gardner Fox, Joe Orlando, Sid Green, Mort Weisinger and many others. I am excited about your return to a monthly publication schedule and hope you can maintain the quality. I kind of miss Gary's cover galleries, but overall the magazine continues to be great! Keep up the amazing work,

Brian Oursler
via e-mail

Hi from England. Now we've all had some time to settle down with Russ at the helm of *CBM*, I'd like to share my thoughts.

I'm pretty happy with the way the mag is in general. I'm OK with items on cartoon strips, statues and films *if* they have relevance to the Golden, Atomic, Silver and Bronze ages.

However, *CBM* has a niche that no other mag fills. Busts of Savage Dragon? A film of *Hellboy*? Frankly, my apathy knows no bounds. Even "New and Noteworthy" comics featuring Spider-Man, the FF, et al are, as far as I'm concerned, related in name only. The continuity and numbering have been played about with for so long, it means nothing to me. Let's not dilute what *CBM* has done well, for so long.

Oh, one other thing, Russ. An editor should spot real 'right in the face' mistakes before the mag goes to print. Mark Squirek's "Greatest Comic Book Ever," *FF* #48, with a 'giant toga-clad Galactus' on the cover?! Does this mean the Watcher was really the guy in the tall purple helmet and I've missed another modern writer's continuity twist?

Thanks for listening. Here's to the centenary issue.

Ian Hare

Ian Hare? THE Ian Hare?! I did proof-read the entire issue, as I always do, with an eagle-eye for typos and boo-boos, but—would you believe it?—I don't know Galactus from Schmalactus, or Watcher. I didn't even understand your criticism until I asked Mark Squirek to explain it to me. But I can tell Flash Gordon from Buck Rogers, and Tarzan from Kaanga, and Krazy Kat from Felix, and shinola from apple butter! Mark's response follows.

RC

The toga-clad figure is really "The Watcher." While the title states "The Coming of Galactus," Galactus himself is not on the cover. Galactus appears in the issue, but he makes his cover debut on *FF* #49. In double-checking my answer in *The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide*, it specifically lists #49 as

[continued on page 79]

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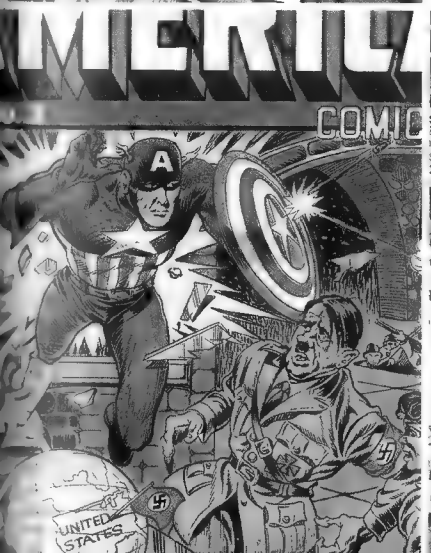
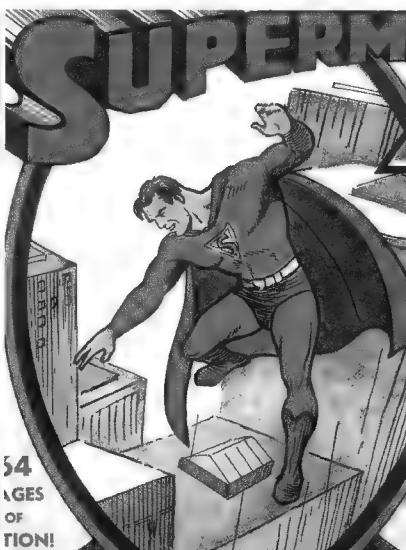




NOLAN'S NOTEBOOK

A Flash of Inspiration

The Importance of Alex Raymond's Flash Gordon in Science Fact and Fiction

by Michelle Nolan

A long time ago, in a galaxy that seems far, far away today, there were Flash Gordon, Buck Rogers, Commando Cody, Klaatu and Gort—and real-life flights to the moon.

The irony of the *Star Wars* films is that for young adults in their 20s and 30s—much less their children—mankind's only flights to another world are merely part of historic events that occurred well before the *Star Wars* saga began 25 years ago.

Just imagine—only people in their early 30s or older can remember the sensation *Star Wars* caused in the early summer of 1977. But it's a shock to realize that you have to be middle-aged to remember our manned flights to the moon.

And, for that matter, you have to be at least 70 to recall what a comic strip and cinematic sensation Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon* originally caused as the fictional fellow who began all this interstellar derring-do.

The 12 astronauts who strode the surface of the moon on the six Apollo missions from 1969 to 1972—six others remained in orbit around Luna, monitoring their missions—grew up inspired by the adventures of Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers in movie serials and comic strips.

The only 18 people in human history who have traveled even as far as a quarter of million miles from earth—the moon is almost that far away—grew up watching Flash Gordon's comic strip exploits and filmic flights to the fictional planet Mongo and a fanciful version of Mars, not to mention Buck Rogers' pioneering comic strip and epic serial journey through the rings of Saturn.

Those serials—15-minute episodes shown in the 1930s and '40s during Saturday matinees and in endless repeats during the early days of commercial television in the 1950s—were the *Star Wars* epics of their day.

Yet those serials are now so old that even many of the grandparents of today's grade-school children are too young to remember them being shown in theaters and may never even have seen them. But great-grandparents surely will recall them!

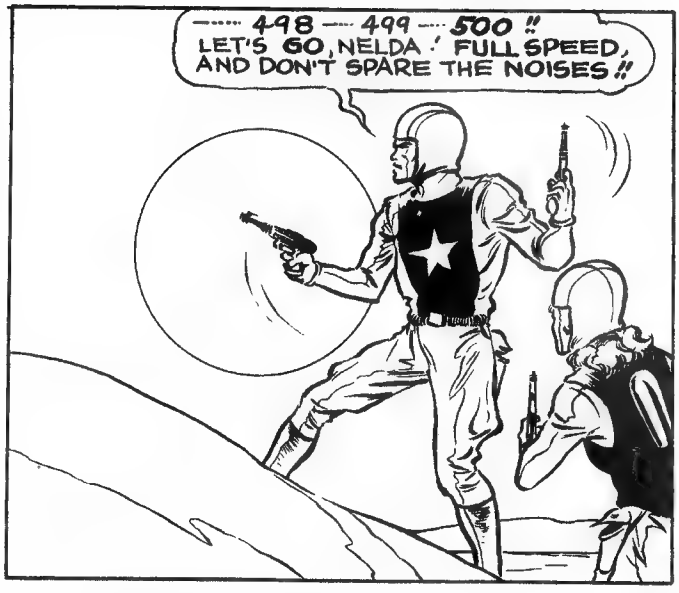
Larry "Buster" Crabbe, later to achieve even greater fame as a movie cowboy, played both Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers in the serials and made a huge impression as the first "spaceman" the vast majority of the public had ever encountered.

Flash, who appeared in hugely profitable serials first released in 1936, 1938 and 1940, was based on the comic strip created in 1934 by Raymond, not only one of the finest cartoonists in history but also one of the most inspirational. Flash's fabulous film feats were the first space travel of mass popular note in the movies, preceded only by a few obscure and long-forgotten movies that touched on the subject.

When American and Soviet astronauts first flew a variety of space missions in the 1960s, capped by the Americans' historic moon landing in 1969, it almost seemed as though the name "Flash Gordon" appeared in news stories and commentary in reference to a real person.

That is not meant to slight Buck Rogers, who may have been referred to as often in those heady days of the Space Race as Flash Gordon was. But Buck was more cartoony than Flash, and was set 500 years in the future. It was Raymond's spectacular art and imagination—for many people, the definitive portrayal of the genre—that perhaps inspired young astronauts and scientists-to-be more than any other element in science fiction.

In that regard, Raymond and his fantastic characters doubtless played a vital role in stirring the imaginations of people who would go on to accomplish feats that many folks considered utterly impossible in the 1930s and '40s, and even well into the '50s.



I well remember how skeptical my elementary school teachers were in the 1950s when I developed an intense interest in both science fiction and the Space Race, and nothing was a bigger part of that than Flash Gordon, in both comic strip and video versions. By that time, of course, Flash had plenty of company in the genre, and comic books like DC's *Mystery in Space* and *Strange Adventures* were "must" reading! My guess is that every artist and writer who worked on those two wonderful DC titles—which featured mind-boggling stories of space travel and evocative art—was inspired by Alex Raymond and *Flash Gordon*.

"Do you really think we'll ever be able to fly to the moon? Isn't that just a little too far-fetched?" my kindly sixth-grade teacher, a woman in her 60s, asked me during the 1959-'60 school year, not long after the original seven Mercury astronauts were named—but more than a year before President Kennedy pledged to land men on the moon by the end of the decade. "Don't you think all that science fiction you read is a waste of time?"

Of course not, I would respond, while turning in one book report after another on the works of Heinlein, Asimov and Clarke, among so many others. In my youthful imagination, flights to the moon would be but the gateway to Mars! But Flash Gordon was my first exposure to the possibilities the future held, and more realistic science fiction made my interest that much keener.

When I drove to Florida to witness in person the awe-inspiring first takeoff for the moon—with about a million other cheering folks on July 16, 1969—I couldn't help but think about Flash Gordon and the characters who followed him. As corny and maudlin as it might sound, I almost seemed to hear Flash's voice checking off the controls in the never-to-be-forgotten roar as Apollo XI lifted off.

A few years later, one of the best essays ever written on Raymond's creation was composed by Arthur Asa Berger, a college professor, in his perceptive book of essays, *The Comic-Stripped American* (1973).

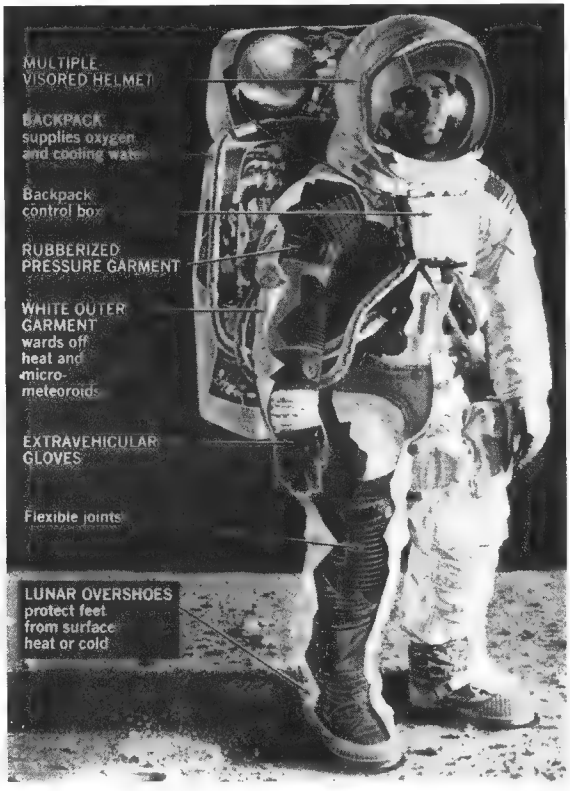
Entitled "Flash Gordon—The Triumph of Democratic Will," Berger's essay highlighted what Flash Gordon meant beyond being an inspiration for would-be space travelers. He summed up the influence of Flash Gordon this way:

> Ultimately Flash Gordon reassures us that the heroic individual, with all power and intelligence (science), will triumph over all adversaries, and that his triumph and the triumphs of millions like him insure the ultimate triumph of freedom and democracy. The relationship that exists between will power and the fates is never adequately resolved; this is a problem we inherited from our Puritan fathers. But there is a little doubt that morality and goodness, when allied with determination, cannot be denied. This is shown in the repeated episodes in the strip in which Flash Gordon is seemingly killed. Inevitably, of course, he is brought back to life and succeeds in defeating his adversaries. If, in the final analysis, all encounters and battles are contingent upon will power, we

> can rest assured. Flash Gordon demonstrates over and over again that goodness is more powerful than evil and that history is the record of the triumph of the democratic will.

I believe Berger's words capture perfectly the essence of the appeal of Raymond's characters, and why they have been so important in comic strip history. But Berger also included an equally compelling paragraph about the power of Raymond's story telling ability as an inspiration to artists:

> Although *Flash Gordon*, which was created to compete with Buck Rogers, is essentially a science fiction epic, there is also a great deal of attention paid to romance in the strip. Love motivates many of the characters, and Flash Gordon often finds himself in delicate situations because women are always falling in love with him. Alex Raymond, who wrote (sic) and drew the strip, had a style very much influenced by fashion illustrators. He was an excellent draftsman and delighted in carefully drawn pictures of women in various revealing costumes and states of semi-nudity. Considering the times (1934-'44), Raymond's women were very sexy, with well-developed breasts, and slim legs. He lavished a great deal of attention on the drawing of breasts, which were usually detailed with lines and shadows.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I surely can't improve on those descriptions of the meaning of Raymond's *Flash Gordon*!

As incredible as it seems now—during the commercially successful *Star Wars* era—Flash Gordon was actually a considerable gamble on the screen in the 1930s. There had never been anything like this character in the movies.

Universal Studios made those Flash Gordon serials on what was, for the time, a grand scale—even though the special effects and matchbox rocket ships bring laughs from young people who see them in grainy black-and-white video images today. Flash and his permanent companions, Dr. Zarkov and the beautiful Dale Arden, battled the likes of Ming the Merciless (played by screen villain supreme Charles Middleton), his daughter Aura and, in the 1938 *Flash Gordon's Trip to Mars*, the wondrous Azura, Queen of Magic.

There was only one Buck Rogers serial, made by Universal in 1939 and based on a character created in a 1928 novel by the otherwise obscure Philip Nowlan for the first true science-fiction magazine, *Amazing Stories*, then only two years old when Buck Rogers first appeared. The daily comic strip by Dick Calkins began in 1929 on the same day as did Hal Foster's *Tarzan*—the first two "seriously fantastic" comic characters to hit the funnies.

There have since been several other film and television incarnations of Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers, of course, but *Star Wars* creator George Lucas, 58, was directly inspired by the original serials, which were re-run many times on television when he was a boy.

Today's youngsters might find it difficult to believe that Flash Gordon and Buck Rogers had space adventure films—other than a few minor efforts—all to themselves until 1950. The subject was simply considered too fantastic for most people to consider seriously and filmmakers wouldn't touch it. The effects of the Great Depression and World War II also kept the vast majority of fictional heroes grounded, or at least well within the Earth's atmosphere. That is why Raymond's *Flash Gordon* holds such a crucial spot in both the development of space fiction and space travel.

The first full-length modern science fiction film, the quasi-realistic *Destination Moon*, arrived in 1950. The

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space flight armada soon struck in earnest for Baby Boomer youngsters, for whom *The Day The Earth Stood Still* in 1951 represented the first famed alien visitors—the kindly but misunderstood scientific genius Klaatu and his giant death-ray robot, Gort. The immortal words "Klaatu Barada Nichto," spoken with a shiver by a terrified Patricia Neal, prevented Gort from destroying the earth.

Granted, Superman arrived from Krypton in 1938, but he was a benevolent alien visitor. The vast majority of aliens, whether humans or monsters, were portrayed with the malevolence that Raymond used to form Ming the Merciless.

Commando Cody and Captain Video soon flew in serial and television versions in the early 1950s along with top-rated TV spacemen Tom Corbett, Rocky Jones and Buzz Corry of the Space Patrol. During the fantasy-deluged decade of the fifties, there was an unending supply of monsters and mayhem along with Martians and Moonmen in films like *It Came from Outer Space*, *It Conquered the World*, *Teenagers from Outer Space*, *Cat Women of the Moon*, *War of the Worlds*, *This Island Earth*, *The Mysterians* and *Forbidden Planet*, to name but a few of dozens.

Perhaps those space films were inevitable by mid-century, especially in the wake of American rocket experiments inspired, ironically, by the success of Nazi Germany's then-revolutionary rocket bombs against England during World War II. In fact, not a few wartime correspondents referred to Buck Rogers in their reports of the Nazi rocket blitz.

But something sad happened not long after the Soviet Union launched the first satellite, Sputnik, on October 4, 1957, and began the Space Race for real. Space films began to disappear—and shortly after Soviet and U.S. astronauts first arrived in space in 1961, filmmakers felt that cheesy special effects could not compete with the pulse-pounding dramatic visions on television news programs.

Other than in the unforgettable *2001—A Space Odyssey* and *Planet of the Apes*, both produced in 1968, space people of any type were barely a blip on the Hollywood radar screen for the better part of 20 years. Even Flash Gordon was reduced to a pornographic satire—*Flesh Gordon* in 1974.

Finally, in 1977—five years after the last manned flight to the moon—*Star Wars* and *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* re-launched science fiction. And, in a way, we've come full circle since Alex Raymond's Flash Gordon first landed on Mongo. Once again mankind's only footsteps on other worlds occur in comics and the movies.

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The Art of Alex Raymond

at

The Belgian Center for Comic Strip Art, Brussels

20th November 2001 to 3rd March 2002

by Paul Gravett

As far as anyone could find out, Alex Raymond had never had a major one-man exhibition of his newspaper strip artwork before. Considering his reputation as one of the three most gifted and influential American comic strip illustrators of all time, alongside Hal Foster and Milton Caniff, this comes as quite a surprise. It was left to Belgium, the homeland of Hergé's *Tintin* and the country with the highest per capita population of 'bande dessinée' creators, to take the initiative. Late last year, Charles Dierick, Director and Curator, organized a breathtaking retrospective of Raymond's originals at The Belgian Center for Comic Strip Art in Brussels. The Center is housed in a beautifully restored Art Nouveau building designed by Victor Horta, and the whole of its light and spacious temporary exhibition gallery was devoted to this show.

As the British liaison, I was lucky enough to be invited to the opening, hosted with the American Embassy in Brussels and attended by prominent Belgian comics professionals. The exhibition was strikingly mounted with big blow-ups of key images, insightful tri-lingual text panels and deep red backdrops to offset over one hundred pieces of comic art. The experience of seeing so many Raymond pieces gathered in one place, up-close, in all their detail, as if fresh from his drawing board, was nothing less than breathtaking.

The majority of Raymond's work was generously lent by private European collectors and included some of the most famous episodes of *Flash Gordon* and some choice examples from his entire career. At dinner later that evening, I had the chance to meet a principal lender, Bernard Mahé, the discreet, but passionate French collector and owner of many of the finest pieces on display. It was a particular pleasure to go round the exhibit with the young, immensely talented Belgian comic creator Alex Séverin, exhibiting in this show, whose 'Harry' albums recapture so much of the finesse of America's Golden Age of Illustration.

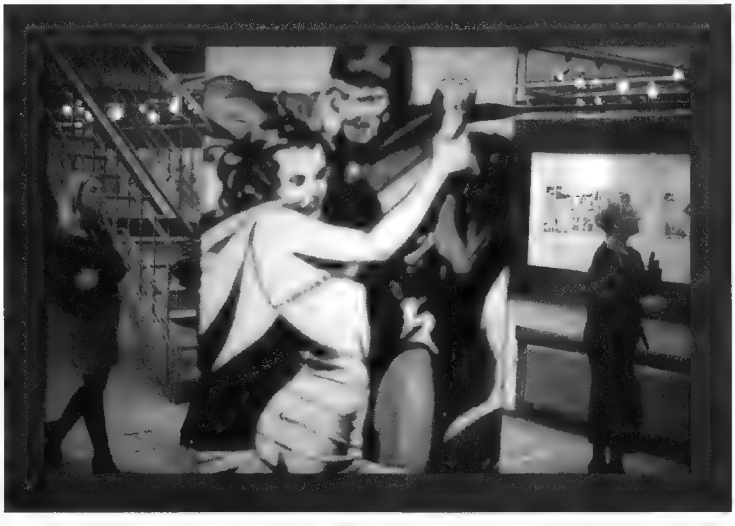


Photo © Daniel Fouss

The exhibit opened with samples of Raymond's early 'ghosting,' on a Chic Young *Blondie* from 1932 and a Lyman Young *Tim Tyler's*

Luck, and of his other outlet, five magazine illustrations, as well as a personal Christmas card. His *Secret Agent X-9* was well represented by twelve prime dailies written by Hammet, starting from April 18, 1934. The greatest visual impact, of course, was provided by Raymond's *Flash Gordon* full-page Sundays and his evolving draughtsmanship. Those especially at the larger scale allowed you to immerse your gaze within each panel, or fixate over a detail, studying his various techniques, as he shifted his media and styles, from his vibrant dry brush mastery to his later refined ink linework. Here were classic installments and iconic moments—Flash embroiled in strangling vines, Queen Fria's snowbird lancers, the dragon snowboarding on its tail. The earliest dated from June 23, 1935, the latest from July 4, 1943, more than twenty in all, including nine with their matching *Jungle Jim* toppers. A further twelve separate *Jungle Jim* Sunday strips spanned from August 25, 1935 to November 30, 1941.

Raymond continued to stretch his artistry in the daily *Rip Kirby* detective strip, of which over sixty were exhibited, the first from May 16, 1946, with examples from every year until May 31, 1956. Less physical and spectacular than Flash, Rip Kirby was an intellectual hero, lower key and more naturalistic, giving Raymond the chance to depict the real world of fashionable women and stylish settings, and to use swirling, cross-hatched textures, deep shadows and silhouettes to heighten the tension. To close, there were single examples by those who took over Raymond's series, namely *Flash Gordon* by Austin Briggs and Mac Raboy, *Rip Kirby* by John Prentice, and *Secret Agent X-9* by Al Williamson.

Raymond has had a massive influence on comic artists the world over and the exhibit ended with a revealing sampling of originals by a few of the many significant European illustrators he has inspired: from France, the science fiction of Jean-Claude Forest's *Barbarella*, Philippe Druillet's *Lone Sloane*, Paul Gillon's *Les Naufragés du Temps* and Raymond Poivet's *Les Pionniers de l'Espérance*; from Holland the adventure strips of Henk Sprenger and Hans G. Kresse; from Great Britain, Frank Hampson's and Frank Bellamy's *Dan Dare*, David Wright's *Carol Day*, Sydney Jordan's *Jeff Hawke*, Jim Holdaway's *Modesty Blaise* and a silent two-pager by veteran Don Lawrence; and from Belgium, Eddy Paape's *Luc Orient* and, most fascinating of all, Edgar P. Jacobs, a Belgian institution for his very English detective duo *Blake & Mortimer*. Jacobs began, however, by taking over Raymond's *Flash Gordon* in late 1942, when the occupying Germans banned the American version. After five weeks of continuing the story in his own direction, Jacobs was ordered to stop the strip and replace it with one of his own, still in the style of *Flash Gordon*. The gallery presented his color pencil study for the second of his substitute *Flash Gordon*s and the first synopsis of his sequel, *Le Rayon U*.

Sadly there was no catalog and a proposed tour of this magnificent exhibition, to Paris and elsewhere, did not materialize. Still, plans are afoot for a Raymond tribute at the Lucca Festival in Italy, possibly this fall. Wherever and whenever this is done again, I urge you to see it for yourself.

BREAKING NEWS!

Many of the pieces seen in Brussels, and others, will be in a fresh Alex Raymond exhibition scheduled for the Lucca Comics Festival in late October. It will then tour to the ExpoCartoon Festival in Rome in mid-November. To coincide with this, Alberto Beccatini's Profili book on Raymond will be published by Antonio Vianovi of Glamour International Magazine. The convention will take place from October 31 until November 3. Check out the Website at www.comune.lucca.it/COMICS/.

Photo © Daniel Fouss

Raymond and the Right Stuff

Among the achievements for which Alex Raymond is noted in histories of this oft-abused artform is that he drew three nationally syndicated comic strips simultaneously. *Jungle Jim* and *Flash Gordon*, both of which began January 7, 1934, and *Secret Agent X-9*, which began two weeks later on January 22. Given the high quality of the illustrative evidence at hand, Raymond's achievement seems all the more remarkable. To do such good work on three comic strips at the same time attests, we are tempted to say, to Raymond's towering graphic genius.

Before surrendering to the temptation, however, we might take a moment to reflect, and in that moment remember that *Secret Agent X-9* was a daily-only comic strip and *Jungle Jim* and *Flash Gordon* appeared only on Sundays. Moreover, *Jungle Jim* was the "topper" for *Flash Gordon*—a one- or two-tier strip that filled out a single page, with *Flash* occupying the bottom two-thirds. The two Sunday-only strips made up a single page of the funnies, just as *Bringing Up Father* and *Snookums* or *Blondie* and *Colonel Potterby and the Duchess* did. So Raymond did no more work in an average week than George McManus did with Jiggs and Maggie or Chic Young with Blondie and Dagwood. Six daily strips and one Sunday page.

Raymond has enjoyed an unremitting and entirely deserved chorus of acclaim, but it is his skill as an illustrator that entitles him to this idolatry, not the quantity of his work. And Raymond earned a secure place in the history of the medium solely as an illustrator of other men's scripts. He was not, strictly speaking, a cartoonist: a cartoonist (by definition—mine anyway) both draws and writes his material, and all of the great strips with which Raymond's name is associated were written by others. Even Raymond's post-war undertaking, *Rip Kirby*, was, at first, written by another (Fred Dickenson), and then, eventually,

plotted by Raymond's editors (chiefly Ward Greene) at King Features in concert with Raymond.

Even though Raymond's consummate artistry elevated the strips above the mundane, they were not all of equal excellence. *Flash Gordon*, which was intended to be King's competition for *Buck Rogers*, is unquestionably Raymond's masterpiece. His great skill in executing the other strips magnified his impact upon the profession, but neither of the other two of his initial trio of strips was particularly distinguished as a comic strip.

Secret Agent X-9, devised by King to capitalize upon the popularity of Chester Gould's cop strip, *Dick Tracy*, and a variation thereof in Norman Marsh's *Dan Dunn*, was written, for most of Raymond's stint on it, by a celebrated writer of hardboiled detective fiction, Dashiell Hammett. When Hammett quit, Raymond reportedly wrote it himself for a brief time, then another mystery writer, Leslie Charteris, took over. Neither Raymond nor Charteris proved very good at writing a comic strip.

As I've said elsewhere (in a book of mine, *The Art of the Funnies*; see my website), despite Raymond's great talent as an illustrator, his use of the comic strip medium was undistinguished. The plots of the two *X-9* adventures presumed to have been written by Raymond stumble along with motiveless actions, and narrative breakdown leapfrogs from one event to another, continuity gaps filled in with huge chunks of narration. Both these adventures rush to conclusion, much of the action taking place "off stage" so that it must be narrated to us in captions, weakening the drama of events.

Raymond's *X-9* strips often lack the variety of panel composition—such things as varying camera angles and distances—that would lend visual drama to the story. Compared, say, to Milton Caniff's work on *Terry and the Pirates* a short time later, much of Raymond's *X-9* seems a monotonous parade of panels in which the characters appear always the same size, always seen from the same angle. Moreover, Raymond's people never change expression: X-9's grim, albeit handsome, visage seems carved in stone, and his facial expression is repeated on the head of every male character in the strip.

TRAPPED IN A HUGE TREE IN THE FORESTS OF BARIN, THE THREE EARTHLINGS FIGHT OFF A FLOOD OF MAD SQUIRLONS... A SINGLE BITE MEANS MADNESS!.....

Raymond in his dry-brush Matt Clark mode.

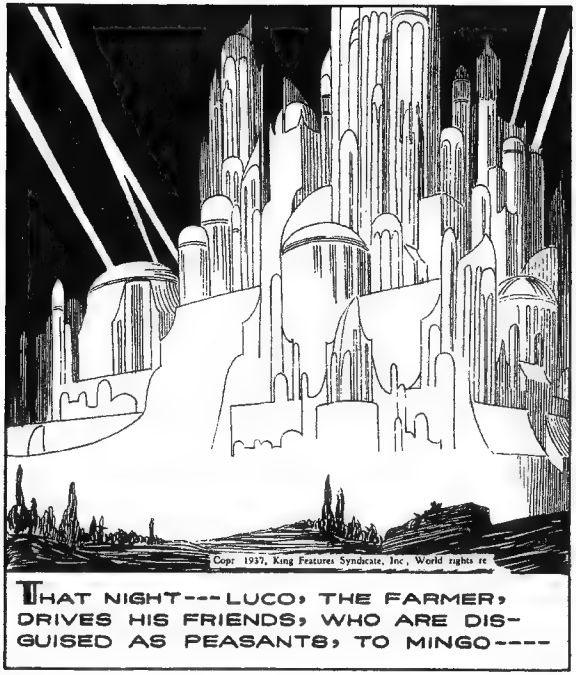
DON'T CRY, DARLING—DON'T YOU SEE? FLASH LEFT BECAUSE HE THOUGHT HIS PRESENCE HERE WOULD CAUSE A WAR BETWEEN BARIN AND MING, MY FATHER—HE LEFT YOU HERE, WHERE YOU'LL BE SAFE—HE'LL BE BACK WITH US SOON—
OH, AURA—IF I CAN'T BE WITH HIM, I DON'T WANT TO BE SAFE—I DON'T WANT TO LIVE!

Raymond imitating John LaGatta's best clinging-gown manner.

Raymond's women, although superbly drawn and seductively beautiful, all look alike, and when he makes both young women in a story dark-haired, we can't tell one from the other—with much resulting confusion about the story's plot (particularly after Hammett had left).

Raymond fared much better on the Sunday pages. The mode of storytelling there—by weekly installment—lends itself to his illustrator's skills without revealing his failings as a visual storyteller. And on the Sunday page, Raymond had more room in which to exercise his graphic skills.

But it was more than format that fired Raymond's imagination. *Jungle Jim* alone, although every bit as well-drawn as Flash, would not have secured Raymond a place in the pantheon of cartooning's greatest practitioners. Concocted, we assume, as King's answer to *Tarzan*, the strip followed the exploits of a hunter named

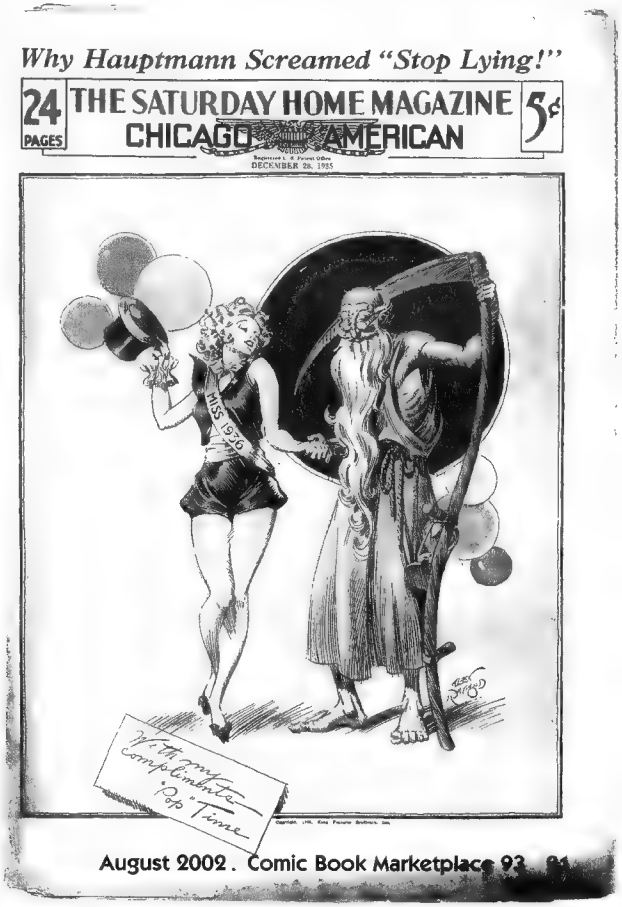

Copr 1937, King Features Syndicate, Inc, World rights re
THAT NIGHT---LUCO, THE FARMER, DRIVES HIS FRIENDS, WHO ARE DISGUISED AS PEASANTS, TO MINGO----

Raymond doing Franklin Booth.

Jim Bradley as he righted wrongs in the jungles of southeast Asia. But Raymond's heart was clearly not in this work: after a couple of years, his pictures appear almost dashed-off. For weeks in mid-1936, the strip's panels were almost wholly devoid of background detail. The strip consisted entirely of pictures of Jim and the other characters talking. They are all attractively drawn. Raymond's technical virtuosity was so great that his figure-drawing alone rescues the strip visually. But he was obviously not putting much work into the feature. His effort—his creative energy, his imagination and skill and dedication—was being poured into the feature at the bottom two-thirds of the Sunday page, *Flash Gordon*.

The graphic excellence that would distinguish *Flash Gordon* did not spring, full-blown, from Raymond's pen with the strip's debut. At first, he drew in the same unembellished illustrative style he had used when ghosting *Tim Tyler's Luck* for Lyman Young in 1933. But before long, he began to feel the influence of other styles of illustration, and the artwork in *Flash* started to change. In using the work of other artists as models for changing his style, Raymond was scarcely unique. Most artists are influenced by what their colleagues do, and they borrow freely this technique and that. When the borrowing is well done, however, it goes beyond mere imitation and gives to the borrower's work a new dimension wholly his own. His work becomes an amalgam of all he has borrowed, unified by a single creative consciousness into something uniquely his—his own style.

It is not clear who influenced Raymond's emerging style the most, although there are several candidates, and he probably borrowed a little from them all (and from others we don't know about). In rendering the futuristic architecture of Mongo, Raymond was obviously imitating Franklin Booth, a turn-of-the-century artist. And Ron Goulart notes that Raymond's contemporaries, Matt Clark and John LaGatta, also supplied models that he employed. "From Clark's slick illustrations," Goulart wrote, "Raymond borrowed a good deal, including the prototype for the new improved version of his other hero, *Jungle Jim*." The influence of LaGatta, who painted beautiful



In late 1935, having given up X-9, Raymond did three cover illustrations for Hearst's **Saturday Home Magazine** (December 7, 21, and this one on the 28th). Raymond was trying to break into illustration but by this time he was also deeply engaged in creating Flash Gordon's world, and his artwork for the comic strip was becoming more and more elaborate, demanding more and more of his time, which he less and less begrudgingly devoted to it.

MEANWHILE, IN A SECLUDED CORNER OF THE BANQUET HALL---
PLEASE, SONJA--- DON'T BE FOOLISH, CHILD---
CHILD? YOU'RE THE FOOLISH ONE, FLASH.
---DALE SAID SHE WOULD BE HERE--I WONDER WHAT IS DELAYING HER---
OH, LET'S FORGET HER, FLASH--SHE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE SO WORRIED ABOUT YOU.

LaGatta's influence continues but Raymond is refining his line, honing it to wire-thin delicacy.

women elegantly gowned in ways that revealed rather than concealed their figures, can be seen clearly in Raymond's increasingly sexy renderings of Dale Arden and the other women in the strip, all of whom started wearing exotic and revealing garments.

By May 1934, Raymond was feathering his line work and modeling figures more extensively, and he began brushing shading into the landscape of Mongo, giving the scenery texture as well as topography. And by the end of the year, Raymond's drawings showed the influence of the dry brush technique of pulp magazine illustrators: his brush strokes were orchestrations of tiny parallel lines, suggesting thereby the stroke of a brush nearly dry of ink. Although Raymond sometimes let his brush go dry, he normally kept enough ink on the implement to give his drawings a liquid sheen. The appearance of dry-brushing, however, gave his pictures great depth and textural beauty, and he employed the same techniques in *Jungle Jim* and *Secret Agent X-9*.

In the summer of 1934, Raymond began to vary the layout of the *Flash* page. The strip had been designed in a four-tier format—four stacked rows of panels. As Raymond's imagination became more and more engaged with the feature, this format seemed increasingly restrictive. In July, he started using an occasional two-tier panel—a picture that spanned vertically the space of two tiers on the four-tier grid—in order to capture more dramatically the atmosphere in which his hero lived. A Booth-like city in the sky is pictured in one such large panel, the increased vertical space giving the scene a dramatic impact it would not have had in a single-tier panel. Seeing the results, Raymond quickly abandoned the four-tier layout in favor of a three-tier arrangement that gave him room to develop all his pictures more extensively. With the larger panels, his backgrounds grew more lavish, and the strip's locale acquired an authentic ambiance. And in these spacious surroundings, the heroic posturing of his characters lent the entire enterprise a majestic air. The world of *Flash Gordon* was becoming manifestly real.

By 1936, the strip was being drawn on a two-tier grid, every panel at least twice as large as the panels had been when *Flash* began. Raymond had given up *Secret Agent X-9* in late 1935, focusing entirely on his weekly page of comics. But it was *Flash* not *Jungle Jim* that absorbed his creative energy. The pictures in *Flash* were luxuriant with telling atmosphere; in *Jungle Jim*, as I've noted, they were scarcely furnished at all. By 1937, the drawings in *Flash* were heavily modeled, the figures given weight and shape by an intricate pattern of brush strokes, the backgrounds enhanced by an extravagant latticework of shading. And still Raymond continued to develop as an artist.

Having reached a level of stylistic achievement unequaled elsewhere in the Sunday funnies, Raymond went on to evolve yet another impressive style in rendering *Flash Gordon*. By the end of 1938, the dry brush-like modeling and shading was giving way to a less sketchy style. Raymond's lines became thinner, more continuous and graceful; his pictures were defined more by line work and less by shading. They became exquisite tableaux, delicately rendered in copious detail. In this period—from 1939 until 1944 when Raymond joined the Marines for the rest of World War II—Raymond's work closely resembled Hal Foster's in *Prince Valiant*; it was the only time the work of these two great illustrators looked much alike.

Early in 1938, Raymond, perhaps following Foster's lead, had begun to eschew speech balloons in *Flash*, but he floated his characters' remarks in clusters of verbiage near their heads; a year later, he began burying speech within quotation marks in the caption blocks at the bottom of each panel. By this time, his storytelling technique was established. He simply illustrated bits of narrative prose, in one superbly

rendered panel after another. But the beautiful pictures were sequentially related only insofar as they depicted successive moments in the narrative. *Flash Gordon* had become an illustrated novel—not a comic strip.

I don't mean by this to belittle Raymond's achievements—only to pinpoint them, to give him his due for what he actually did. And he did plenty.

That *Flash Gordon*, Dale Arden, Ming the Merciless and all the rest have become a part of the American cultural heritage is, in itself, a testament to Raymond's accomplishment as well as to the power of the medium. Like Sherlock Holmes before him and James Bond afterwards, Flash Gordon leapt from the printed page into the hearts and minds of his readers and eventually emerged on the motion picture screen. But even before his celluloid incarnation in the 1936 serial, Flash was already as real to his readers as it is possible for a literary creation to be. And that was due almost entirely to Raymond, whose consummate artistry stamped the strip, the characters, and the stories with an illusion of reality that was more than convincing: it was spectacular.

Although Raymond is no longer credited with single-handedly producing *Flash*, it is nonetheless undeniable that it was his graphics that clothed Don Moore's stories in their most irresistible raiment. As Stephen Becker has observed in his *Comic Art in America* (1959): "What made *Flash Gordon* outstanding was not the story; along the unmarked trails of intersteller space any continuity was original. Nor were Flash and his lady friend radical departures from the traditional hero and heroine. But *Flash* was beautifully drawn."

No one can deny Moore's contribution. His stories, built archetypically around Flash as god-like redeemer (the savior from another world), were suspenseful, fast-paced, and ingenious. But for all their ingenuity of incident, they were too fast moving to allow much time for character development. Flash, the polo player turned savior, is everything we expect in an adventurer—courageous, honest, nobly motivated and above all resourceful. But he is nothing more. Apart from possessing the traditional, culturally-prescribed traits of a hero, Flash has no personality. His love for Dale is perfunctory: he is the hero; she, the heroine, and the customary relationship between such persons is love. In Dale's pettish flashes of jealousy (which spark with such routine predictability throughout the run of *Flash*), we see all the individuality that she is allowed.

Said Coulton Waugh in his venerable *The Comics* (1947): "These lithe, sexy young people have an empty look—one feels that a cross-section would show little inside their hearts and heads." But with Raymond's drawing, we seldom notice this flaw. His graphics give the strip's characters

① FLASH AND DALE ARE LOST IN THE DISMAL JUNGLES OF BARIN--DURING THEIR SEARCH FOR THE CRAZED DR. ZARKOV, FLASH IS CAUGHT IN A STRANGLER VINE!...
---DALE'S TERRIFIED SCREAMS MINGLE WITH THE THUNDER OF AN APPROACHING STORM!-----
MINGO IS A CITY OF FIESTA AND CARNIVAL, MADLY CHEERING "FLASH AND FREEDOM!" IN WILD JOY OVER THE END OF MING'S CRUEL REIGN.
1.

(Left) Dry-brush exoticism in rendering. (right) By the early 1940s, Raymond was drawing with a fragile thin line and rendering every erotic wrinkle.

MING, PREPARED AGAINST A RESCUE ATTEMPT BY FLASH, BANQUETS WITH THE UNHAPPY DALE—"IF I KNOW FLASH," SAYS MING, "AND I THINK I DO—IF I CAN JUDGE BY PAST PERFORMANCES, HE'LL COME SOON—AND WHEN HE DOES---"
6-9-40.

Raymond's rendering of Dale Arden and all the women in the strip is always exquisite. Even without exotic costume, Dale is beautiful and sexy.

such life-like appearance that we overlook the absence of individual personality in them. They are larger than life—or, at least, more beautiful, handsomer, more graceful. And the beauty of these visuals seduces us into believing in the characters, who look and move like we would like to look and move.

"The total effect," Becker said, "—slick, imaginative drawing with literate narrative—was one of melodrama on a high level, which should not obscure the fact that Raymond's villains were thoroughly wicked or that his female characters were generally sexy. *Flash* rapidly became the premier space strip. It was wittier and moved faster than *Buck Rogers*; it was prettier and less boyish than William Ritt's and Clarence Gray's *Brick Bradford*."

There is no question that it was Raymond's art that brought *Flash Gordon* alive, his art that made the characters live in the minds of their readers. But that art could not flourish, could not reach the luxuriance of its full growth, in the small daily panels of *Secret Agent X-9*. Despite the considerable merit of Raymond's work on *X-9*, neither the format nor the subject was amenable to the levitating magic that his art performed in *Flash*. And while the format of *Jungle Jim* was ample enough, the subject did not fire Raymond's imagination as did the mythology of the redeemer in Moore's tales of *Flash Gordon* on the planet Mongo. *Flash Gordon* is a clear instance of subject and artist locked in symbiotic embrace, the artist driven to achieve at ever higher levels by his subject, the subject elevated in turn by the artist's endeavors.

Foster and Raymond produced impressive works. But for all their undeniable skill as illustrators, neither Foster nor Raymond were cartoonists. The works that brought them fame and earned them their niches in the history of the medium were illustrated narratives, not comic strips. Word and picture did not blend in *Tarzan* or *Prince Valiant* or *Flash Gordon* in that uniquely reciprocating way that defines a comic strip. Foster and Raymond were successful illustrators—spectacularly so on the pages of the Sunday funnies. But the real master of the comic strip form was Milton Caniff, who, as Foster labored in the African jungles of the Sunday *Tarzan* and Raymond started dashing from the jungles of southeast Asia to the drawing rooms of urban America to the alien tyranny of Ming's Mongo, was waiting in the wings, doing a warm-up with a comic strip about a boy who dreamed great adventures for himself. But more of Caniff later this year.

And next time, unless the pirates get dared into draggin' ladies into a canyon where they'll be deliberately obscured with chiaroscuro, we'll tell a lulu of a story about the first female cartoonist to become a mogul.

THERE GO TWO OF THE SWELLEST PEOPLE IN THE WORLD, KOLU!
YES, TUAN....IT IS INDEED SO....EXCUSE IT PLEASE, BUT MISSY LIL WANT YOU ON 'PHONE..... SHE SAY IMPORTANT
NEXT WEEK
ON THE BUND

Jungle Jim in Raymond's Matt Clark period but without much detail or atmosphere.

Because of the many questions that collectors have asked about CGC and their grading/slabbing services, CBM *is pleased to announce this new monthly column where you may ask CGC to respond to any question you might have. Send your questions by e mail to russcochran@townsqr.com with the subject line ASK CGC.*

What is CGC's definition of restoration?

Restoration is anything that has been added to a comic book by someone other than the original printer to enhance its appearance or to maintain it's structural integrity in order to better preserve it. Cleaning is also considered restoration even though nothing has been added. Tape is not considered restoration because prior to CGC it was not considered so by the collecting community.

Why don't you publish your grading standards?

CGC uses Overstreet grading standards in conjunction with "market" standards that were based on a survey of top collectors and dealers' interpretation of the Overstreet grading guide, including Bob Overstreet himself. Since Gemstone publishes the Overstreet grading guide already, there is no reason for CGC to publish a second grading guide. Mark Haspel and Steve Borock are Overstreet grading advisors and, along with many of the top people in our hobby, they will be working closely with Bob Overstreet and company on the new grading guide.

Is the inner plastic sleeve that holds the comic book made of Mylar? If not, what is it made of and is it archival?

The interior "well" that houses the comic book is made of Barex. It is in the Mylar "family" and just like Mylar. As long as the comic is stored in the right conditions, the comic book will be safe for many, many years. The AACC did an independent study* of this last year and found Barex to be "in the same class" with Mylar. We are sure that if anyone asks the AACC for the results, they will be happy to provide them.

Why do you give blue labels to books published before 1950 that have been restored?

CGC, since before it's inception, has always stated that, at CGC's discretion, Golden Age comics with the most minor color touch and/or the most minor glue will be given a blue label but the very minor glue/color touch will ALWAYS be noted on the label. The comic grade will be lowered one step on the grading scale for this because the "work" done to the book is so minor that if removed, it would only change the grade by one step if at all.

The reason CGC decided to do this is that many of the high-grade pedigree Golden Age comic books have had very minor work done to them and it was always either accepted or ignored by the buyers and sellers of these comic books. CGC could not come into the market and ignore very minor work because CGC is about full disclosure so, to be fair to both buyer and seller alike, we decided to go with the blue label, a one step down grade, and a notation about the work that was done.

*See "The Naiman Report" on pages 71-72 for a more complete look at this report.

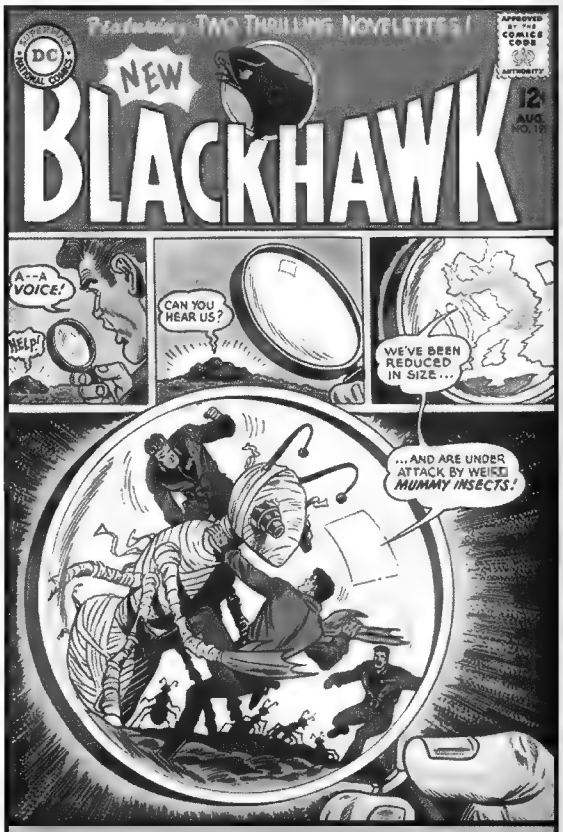
Oddball Comics © 2002 by Scott Shaw! CBM93-7

This uniquely Oddball cover for "The Attack Of The Mummy Insects" sports the sort of bizarre image that fairly demands that the casual funnybook browser pick up the comic and read the story within—if for no other reason than to provide some sort of half-baked explanation for the nutty cover scene!

Here's the story, at least as far as I can attempt to understand it.

Mysterious emissions of gas and smoke occur in unrelated urban areas, to little or no effect; meanwhile, from out of nowhere, a gigantic dragonfly is attacking aircraft. Fortunately, the high-flyin' Blackhawks soar to the rescue, destroying the rogue insect. The Blackhawks then meet an insectologist, Professor Marley, who takes the team to his laboratory to show examples of various ordinary insects suddenly exhibiting bizarre and unusual behavior. They're surprised to encounter what appear to be bizarre living mummy insects, when the scientist suddenly disappears! Tracking the mysterious insects to a mound/nest in the nearby woods, Blackhawk, Andre and Stanislaus also vanish! The remaining teammates are astounded to discover that the professor and their comrades have been shrunken and are now the captives of the Anteos, intelligent alien insects who wrap themselves like mummies to protect themselves from our sun! They plan to conquer earth for its vegetation, but first they want to eliminate all competition from Earth's insect population! (Somehow, that's supposed to account for the mysterious gas, smoke and insect behavior at the story's opening.) Of course, the miniaturized Blackhawks manage to escape their captors and alert their normal-sized teammates to the situation. Using a phosphorus-trailing bullet to incinerate the heat-fearing alien bugs, Blackhawk, Andre, Stanislaus and Professor Marley are soon restored to their normal stature!

Man, that took a lot of work, just to explain the supposed existence of mummy insects!



BLACKHAWK
ISSUE NUMBER: 199
COVER DATE: August 1964
PUBLISHER: National Periodical Publications
COVER ARTIST: Dick Dillon

ODDBALL Factoid: This issue also features a back-up story titled "The Fabulous Blackhawk Freaks." In it, exposure to gas from an alien space ship caused Henderson to become a "human dirigible," Andre to become "a living rubber band" (a la Plastic Man) and Chop-Chop to become "the Chinese Superman"! Ultimately, their newfound powers proved to be temporary, at least until issue #230, wherein editorial whims once again transformed the Blackhawk teammates into Oddball super-heroes.

B. KRIGSTEIN VOLUME 1

BY GREG SADOWSKI

Book Review
by Paul Gravett

When Bernie Krigstein finally turned his back on the declining, formula-bound, space-restricted American comic book industry in 1957, the medium lost forever one of its few genuine visionaries. Krigstein was a thinker, a questioner, a radical, a man of culture with a love of art in all its forms, including, of all things, the lowly comic. The proof that this principled Jewish intellectual was years ahead of his time becomes abundantly clear in the first of Greg Sadowski's two-volume biography, an elegant 250-page hardback art book (the same size as the EC Libraries), covering from his birth in 1919 to his departure from EC Comics in 1955. Sadowski highlights Krigstein's thinking and questioning about art and particularly about comics, not only in the six complete stories reprinted here and in numerous single-page and single-image extracts, but also just as forcefully through Krigstein's insightful comments in interviews, letters and articles about the deeper possibilities of the comics.

Krigstein's studies and finished pieces sometimes invite comparison to established masters (here Van Gogh, or Daumier), but in his mature work there is an indefinable spark of his own. Compare the character evident in the face in the oil **Mendy** (1950 version) with a contemporaneous comics panel, from **Real Clue Crime Stories** V5#6 (Aug 50).

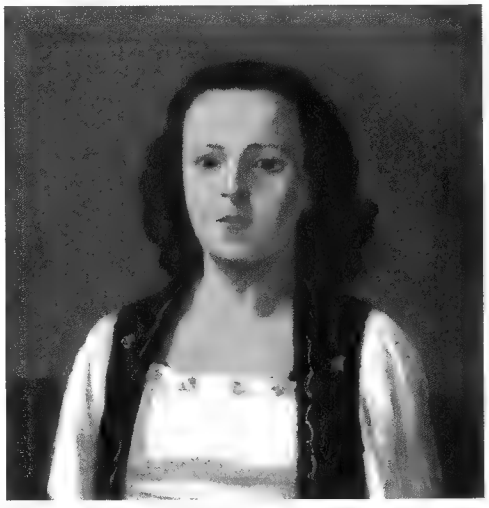
Few at that time shared his pretensions. To many, drawing comic books was the very bottom of the ladder, merely a temporary job to pay the bills, while touting around for something, anything, better. Fresh from a fine art background, Krigstein was different; as his colleague and friend Gil Kane put it, "Once he saw comics, he thought it was such an extraordinary area of expression that he wanted to be a part of it." Farsightedly, some fifty years ago, Krigstein was already envisioning the sorts of ambitious, expansive, mature comics, using both words and pictures to their fullest, that have truly begun to flourish in America only in recent years with the emergence of the graphic novel. The tragedy for the medium is that after one final 32-page oddity in 1962, based on the TV cop show "87th Precinct," he never drew published comics again.

In her touching foreword to this book, his late widow Natalie recalled that he had tried to persuade publishers to let him adapt *War and Peace*, *Red Badge of Courage* and other literary fiction into comics. Rather than distilling them down to the bare-bones plot synopses of so many *Classics Illustrated*s, he drew up plans for opening them out into a hundred, or a thousand, pages and unlocking all their visual and verbal possibilities. No publisher would touch them. Natalie Krigstein also remembered, "He did express great admiration for some of the underground comics in the 1970s, and he was tempted to return to the field—but perhaps he felt it was too late." If only he could have been given that second chance, to be a pioneer of the graphic novel, like Will Eisner, two years his senior. Alas, it was not to be. Instead, for the

Fantagraphics Books, 250 9x12 inch pages + foreword, $49.95, ISBN 1-56097-466-4

rest of his days, Krigstein returned to his other loves of painting, illustration and teaching, all fulfilling pursuits which earned him accolades, awards and a living.

With total access to the Krigstein archives, Sadowski selects for this book a wealth of his accomplished oils, watercolors, etchings and drawings. Looking to purchase one of his drawings, Sadowski first met Krigstein's widow eight months after his death. Most examples shown demonstrate Krigstein's undoubted skills and his diverse media and influences, which fed into, and fed on, his comics. But frankly they reinforce the inescapable truth, that drawing comics was his most singular, significant and sadly abandoned gift.



Like the Social Realists and some Dada, even seemingly banal Krigstein brims with inner life, it is hard for us today to not think of Kahlo when looking at this oil of wife Natalie (1946).

Sadowski pinpoints what set Krigstein apart from the majority of his peers: his fierce belief in elevating the role and standing of the artist to advance the potential of comics. In today's era of creators' copyrights, credits, royalties, contracts, return of artwork and other progress, it's hard to appreciate what many comic book artists had to put up with in the Fifties as expendable hirelings, subservient to writers, editors and publishers. Sadowski charts Krigstein's campaign in 1952 to unionize his fellow artists in The Society of Comic Book Illustrators, the first of a number of failed attempts to do so. He also reveals the ego clashes and disappointments that eventually drove Krigstein out of the business. Two primary causes of this were the insistence by editors and writers on 'value-for-money' multiple short stories within so many of their titles, and the predominance of the words over the pictures, to the point that a silent, word-free panel was almost unheard of. Space was always at a premium and he was never granted more than nine pages maximum, and typically only four to six. Krigstein never wrote his own stories, but he was driven to make them his by revising and expanding their visualization, the last thing some of his bosses wanted.

Early on, he was lucky at Hillman Comics in 1950 to win some unusual perks from Ed Cronin, who let him ink his own pencils and experiment with his pacing and drawing. Reflecting his greater pride in his work, it was here that he gave up the pseudonym 'B.B. Krig' (B.B. standing for his mock-macho army nickname 'Ballbuster') and began signing his name. During a later brief trial at top publisher DC Comics, however, editors ruled and artists could not deviate from its polished house veneer. Sadowski quotes DC war comics writer and editor, Robert Kanigher, defining it as "...illustrators of the written word. The word, the thought always came first. They weren't artists. There are no artists in comics." Kanigher went so far as to have Krigstein's artwork shaved with razors to 'correct' his expressionistic anatomy so that it conformed to his editorial standards of realism.

Krigstein enjoyed more freedom, or less supervision, over at the high-volume 'factory' of Atlas, now Marvel, to pace and design at the pencil stage. He drew some seventy-seven stories, on and off between 1950 and 1957, more than for any other outfit and roughly a third of his total output, but most were a mere four pages long. To challenge himself and make more of these tales, he wound up reducing the opening 'splash' image and subdividing each page into smaller panels. At his peak he squeezed a record seventy-five panels into only four pages. For all this effort, the page rate shrank to only $23, and the scripts, many by Stan Lee, were often lightweight, especially once the Comics Code cleaned up the contents.

A chapter from the second volume of Sadowski's biography, due next summer, was previewed in *The Comics Journal* Winter 2002 Special Edition. In this, he narrates that the last straw was Stan Lee's demand in 1957 on "Phantom of the Farm" that, as writer and editor, he had every right to insist that Krigstein amalgamate some of his extra panels and allow him to add balloons into his deliberately silent panels. When Krigstein refused and threatened to sue, the story was published unchanged. His next four-pager for Atlas was his last.

Bernie Krigstein's forty-four stories for the maverick EC Comics from 1953 to 1955 are his pinnacle, but here too he struggled against their rigid working systems. EC is generally hailed as the period's most enlightened publisher in the field and encouraged Krigstein to bring in a variety of artistic inspirations to suit each tale, from Chinese prints to German expressionist film. But still the writer and editor dominated. Their chief writer Al Feldstein, an artist himself, would provide Krigstein with art boards, on which the

This pencil for an uncompleted oil inadvertantly brings to mind the underdrawing for a mural, but is still unmistakably Krigstein (drawing for **Wild Boys**, ca. 1947).

empty panels were already lettered with his often-wordy descriptive captions and dialog balloons. Krigstein strove to use the panel spaces to make pictures that could resonate with and interpret the texts, rather than simply accompany and duplicate them. To EC publisher Bill Gaines' surprise, "...he had pages where nobody said anything, and that's using comics to their ultimate. We could never dream of that—we couldn't waste the space."

If anything, Harvey Kurtzman, writer and layout artist on EC's satirical hit *MAD*, was even more restrictive. Though less verbose and more visually conscious, his tightly penciled master layouts had to be adhered to. On their first collaboration, "From Eternity to Here," a parody of the movie "From Here to Eternity," Kurtzman could not tolerate Krigstein's ignoring the penciled directions and introducing ideas of his own. Kurtzman was also unhappy with their next *MAD* piece and disliked the "grimness" that Krigstein adopted to show how harrowing in real life George McManus's husband-battering in *Bringing Up Father* would be, in stark contrast to Will Elder's zany version of the cartoon domestic violence of the newspaper strip. For all their mutual admiration and understanding of the medium, Harvey and Bernie never worked together again.

In these circumstances, it was a stroke of luck that Krigstein was assigned to draw "Master Race."

Krigstein's pen and ink sketches and cartoons rivaled the classics of the previous two centuries, this one evocative of a Hogarth, or a Wilhelm Busch (an editorial cartoon in an Army newspaper during his World War II service).

"B. KRIGSTEIN VOLUME I"

Feldstein wrote this intense study of the legacy of the Holocaust in the second person, from inside the mind of a paranoid Nazi death-camp commandant who, on being recognized and pursued by one of his surviving victims on the subway, panics and falls under a train. Krigstein saw such scope in it that he asked for an unprecedented twelve pages; he had to make do with eight, thanks to the absurd dictum that this was the longest an EC story could run. So he cut up the lettering and reconfigured the layouts to introduce extra panels, most famously an exceptional two-tier, eleven-panel, wordless climax. The whole became his master class on how words and pictures can be combined only in comics into so much more than the sum of their parts.

Two other complete EC classics, Ray Bradbury's "The Flying Machine" and "The Catacombs," are presented, re-colored by original colorist Marie Severin, as well as two Westerns, "Black Silver Heart" and a "Nuggets Nugent" tale, and "Joseph and His Brethren" from Atlas' *Bible Stories for Young Folk*. There are many other revelations in this first volume: his touching wartime letters and sketches to his new wife; their painful loss of their son Paul at only sixteen months; seven of eight penciled pages of an apparently unpublished 1949 crime story; his black and white illustration samples reworked from comic book panels; the discovery that he illustrated the notorious 1938 *Horrors of War* gum card series; and tantalizing single pages from the majority of his comics, leaving the reader to imagine the rest of the stories. At least we can read all of his EC classics, in affordable reprint editions and the deluxe EC Libraries, while the website **www.bkrigstein.com** is putting his non-EC comics online and Sadowski hints that he hopes to work with Severin on a future volume of Krigstein stories.

In the meantime, he has coordinated this exceptionally thorough, intimate biography of one of America's most challenging and urgently relevant comic book artists.

From Fandom to

A chat with Gail Simone

by Jennifer M. Contino

Gail Simone didn't think when she sent a few gag letters out to a couple of friends poking fun at a few comics pros, that she'd move from the private exchanges to her own spotlight as a part of Comic Book Resources' stable of columnists. However, soon her weekly offering, "You'll All Be Sorry," was at the top of comic fans' Monday routine, gathering a nice following from the pros as well. Soon Simone went from crackin' fun online to scribing fun offline in Springfield—well in Simpson's Comics, *but it's the same difference. Now, besides writing about Bart Simpson, she's busy working on* Deadpool *and* Killer Princesses, *along with a few other coals in the fire—not bad for a hairdresser, eh? Although the talented scribe couldn't reveal much about her future works, we did manage to get some information out of her.*

Comic Book Marketplace: How did you "discover" comic books?

Gail Simone: I grew up on a very remote farm in a small town in Oregon, where TV reception was spotty, and we didn't have the choices for entertainment that city kids had. You may know that Oregon has a lot of precipitation, so that meant a lot of indoor activity. All reading was encouraged, including comics, which is good, because otherwise I couldn't have this cool second career.

CBM: Which early comics were your favorites?

Simone: One quirk is that I never used to read the credits, so in many cases, I still have no idea who wrote my favorite stories as a kid, but I read pretty much the whole gamut. I loved the horror comics out there, although for the most part they were pretty tame. There was something great about how comics were slightly unsavory despite how squeaky-clean the contents were. I did like a couple super-hero books, *Batman*, *New Teen Titans* and *X-Men*, but it wasn't my favorite genre. My Marvel exposure was very thin. The stories were always continued so the odds were that I wouldn't be able to read the whole arc.

CBM: Who's your favorite comic book character?

Simone: That's a toughie—possibly Swamp Thing. Or Groo. Or Buddy Bradley. I still like the idea of Batman quite a bit, although the invincible grim guy in the current books is harder for me to follow, despite great writing.

CBM: Many fans at one time or another stop reading and pick up the hobby again later in life. If you have always read comics without a break, then what factors kept you coming back for more? If you *did* take a break from comics, what influenced this decision and what brought about your return?

Simone: I did stop, more than once, either because life got in the way, or for budgetary reasons, or there just wasn't anything on the stands. In each case, a comic came around that just seemed too interesting to pass by, i.e. *Watchmen*, *Swamp Thing* and *Kingdom Come*. I had a long break right before *Kingdom Come*. Damn you Mark Waid!

CBM: Since you've only recently started writing comics, what other jobs have you had and are you just writing full time now or still doing the 9-5?

Simone: Still have a day job, but I get to make my own hours, and I've been cutting down, especially when deadlines loom. But I don't want to give it up entirely (I'm a hairdresser) because I really enjoy it, and it's my real-world connection!

the Front Lines

CBM: Why hairdressing?

Simone: Well, it's creative, I get to make my own hours, I get to pick my own clients and it's a fun thing to do...someone comes in sad and leaves delighted. That's a good job to have!

CBM: Most people became familiar with you from Women In Refrigerators. What inspired you to create that website?

Simone: I kept seeing these articles where guys would say, "Why don't more women read comics?" and it seemed to me that it might be because there was a paucity of interesting female characters, *and* those that did exist were getting killed and maimed with stunning regularity.

Gail Simone by Lisa Renee Jonte

CBM: Besides sparking debate from comics fandom, pros from all comics areas—independents, mainstream, editors, writers, artist, etc.—responded and offered comments about the site. Do you think that WiR helped to make writers more conscientious of their treatment of female characters? Have you noticed a difference in the amount of "bodies" in the refrigerators since?

Simone: First question, probably not, although I suppose it's possible. It was a very controversial site. But whatever the reason, female readership (as a percentage) seems to be way up...and I think you have to blame that on all the writers now who *are* creating interesting and powerful female characters. For decades, the line has always been "girl comics don't sell," and yet now, we're seeing that comics with a strong appeal for girls do in fact sell, very well indeed. So the site is mostly moot at this point, and I'm glad.

CBM: When you first started writing funny stories about pros to amuse your friends, did you ever dream they would become usenet legends and lead to a writing gig with Comic Book Resources?

Simone: Nope, never. In fact, I was horrified when the first pieces started getting circulated as spam. I just whipped

them out to amuse my friends. Definitely a strange upward spiral.

I had no intention of ever becoming a writer. I had a few pro friends, and they'd say, "Hey, you should submit something," and I'd just scoff. I didn't think any companies were out there saying, "Hey, we should get a female hick town hairdresser with no experience to write some comics for us!"

But luckily, companies today don't care where you're writing from, as long as you can do the work.

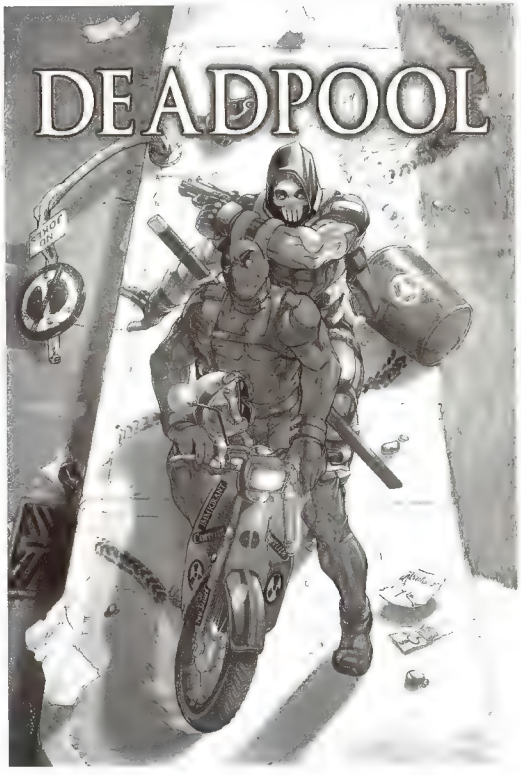
CBM: What made you call the column "You'll All Be Sorry"?

Simone: A CBR friend of mine, Paul Teel, came up with that, and it's a good thing, because I almost named it CONFABTASMAGLORY! Well, no I didn't.

CBM: What did you enjoy the most about writing YABS?

Simone: Ah! It was fun and challenging to try to write in those different styles each week. It was important to me to try not to repeat myself week after week, and very rewarding that so many people went along with the gag. One week it'd be Conan's love for his stuffed tiger, and the next week it'd be the Punisher's secret poetry notebook.

Plus, I have to admit I loved getting the response, even the bad response sometimes. The response from pros whose work I'd always admired was wonderful. When Paul Dini likes your Batman story, that's a great feeling. I actually got letters from pros who were mad I hadn't parodied them. They're all still archived at comicbookresources.com



CBM: What, if anything, was the least enjoyable about working on the column?

Simone: For a fan column, it was just an unbelievable amount of work. As I said, I don't have the best head for remembering detail, so I also had to take a lot of notes and do research. Just a time-consuming thing.

CBM: Would you like to eventually have a collected edition of YABS? I think that many fans would snatch up a book of your columns. Has anyone approached you to do this?

Simone: Yeah, even now I get a bunch of letters each week, and weirdly, I still get job offers from people reading the old columns. But the companies that wanted to do it seem to be having some financial stress, so it's on the back burner, but I think it'd be a fun collection.

CBM: How did you move from writing a satirical column to writing comics?

Simone: It happened because Scott Shaw! (from CBR's "Oddball Comics"—go read it now!) read the column and was very enthusiastic. He simply insisted I submit some springboards to Bongo Comics, and they were received enthusiastically.

It went like this:

Bongo: Send some springboards.

Me: Okay, what are springboards?

Bongo: We like these, send some outlines.

Me: Great! What are outlines?

It was sort of pathetic on my part. But thankfully, Bongo is just a brilliant company to work for, and they helped me avoid dumb rookie mistakes.

After that, editors from various [titles] just kept asking me to pitch, and I was fortunate enough to get the assignments. Pretty brave editors, I thought!

CBM: Bart Simpson and the rest of the gang are a blast! What are some of the biggest challenges to writing their adventures?

Simone: *First* is that the show has been on twelve years, and that's a lot of brilliant gags. You have to make sure your gag hasn't been done, and each story has dozens. To really capture the feel of the show, you have to pack in a lot of funny.

Then you have to make sure that there's an actual story, because gag without story is gagging.

Art on pages 32-35 by UDON Studios

Finally, it's harder because the voice acting is so brilliant—and we don't have that. You have to try to emulate the acting talent, which is much harder than it sounds. I just wrote a story with Dr. Hibbert, and his sole gag, really, is his chuckle. How do you convey that? How do you even spell it? So we resort to trickery.

But who cares? It's the Simpsons, and I love it.

CBM: What's the process like writing a comic based on an existing TV property? Do you have to go through a lot of channels to get scripts and proposals approved?

Simone: Not with Bongo, no. They do that, and go mostly straight to Matt Groening with anything they're iffy on. They protect the writer. Love those guys. Matt's a great sport.

CBM: Besides the Simpsons, you're also working with the Diva of comics, Lea Hernandez. How have you enjoyed the experience with *Killer Princesses*?

Simone: Meeting Lea, honestly, is like finding a Texas sister I didn't know I had. I knew her from her wonderful series *Rumble Girls*, and when she asked me to write something for her, I was thrilled to do so. We've had no debates whatsoever on KP. We both know those girls inside and out, and Lea's *brilliant* at adding funny things in the artwork. She really is. People who only know her from *Rumble Girls* are gonna be amazed.

CBM: Who are the Killer Princesses?

Simone: Currently, they are Faith, Hope, and Charity...three agents of the mysterious SORORITY, which is a worldwide organization with a really bizarre agenda. They're assassins, sometimes for hire, sometimes to further the Sorority's political plans.

And they're not actually too bright. They have a combined IQ in the low teens. It's fun. It works off of the formula that three dimwits plus guns equals entertainment.

CBM: Besides hyperactive boys and princesses, you're also writing mutants. What about Deadpool appealed to you and made you want to write this series?

Simone: *Deadpool* has a lot of attractive features to me: Moral questions, tragic background, skewed sense of perspective, doesn't have a power ring—that's a lot to work with. He steps back and sees how ridiculous the world is. I like his unpredictability. People think he's just a clown, but in fact, he just copes differently. I dig him.

CBM: Many people have written his "adventures." How will your version of *Deadpool* be different from the rest?

Simone: It's not my goal to be similar or different from previous writers. Honestly, I just want the stories to be funny and compelling. *Deadpool*'s got a great writer pedigree—Kelly, Waid, Priest, Tieri, Scalera, Palmiotti, Fabian—there's no point in trying to recapture that. It's better just to do what seems right. One key element I'm trying to introduce is that, as often as possible, each issue is a satisfying whole unto itself, while the greater arc progresses as well.

Marvel's been very supportive. We're one of three books getting a big re-launch this year—*Deadpool* will be re-launched as *Agent X*, *X-Force* becomes *X-Statics*, and *Cable* becomes *Soldier X*. The art team, Udon Studios, is doing incredible work. If you like a skewed vision of what an action book can be, *Agent X* is going to fit that bill nicely, we hope.

CBM: What's coming up for *Deadpool*?

Simone: Some issues are comedy-of-errors farces, and some are more serious. There's great freedom in the book, because you're not tied down to one type of story. *Agent X* continues that unpredictability.

CBM: Why is now a good time to start reading the comic?

Simone: It's a great time to jump aboard because we're at a point where Deadpool's long history isn't a major factor in enjoying the book. Those elements are in there for long-time readers, but the focus is on the lead characters as if they were brand new.

CBM: Who, if anyone, will guest star from the Marvel Universe in upcoming issues?

Simone: The Rhino and Dazzler have already appeared as a faded lounge act. Of *course* we had to put them together! Punisher appears in issue two, Taskmaster has a major and unique role, and in issue six, it's a huge guest-star blowout. It's gonna be very fun and wrong. Hope you enjoy it!

CBM: When you get creative blocks, what do you do to "unblock" yourself?

Simone: By working. One benefit of doing multiple gigs is that when Deadpool isn't listening, you can go tell Bart what to do for a while.

CBM: What's a typical workday like for you?

Simone: I usually get up and do some work before my day job, and answer letters if necessary. Editors call at work, so I finally got a headset phone. Then I come home and write, write, write.

CBM: Is your husband a comic book fan?

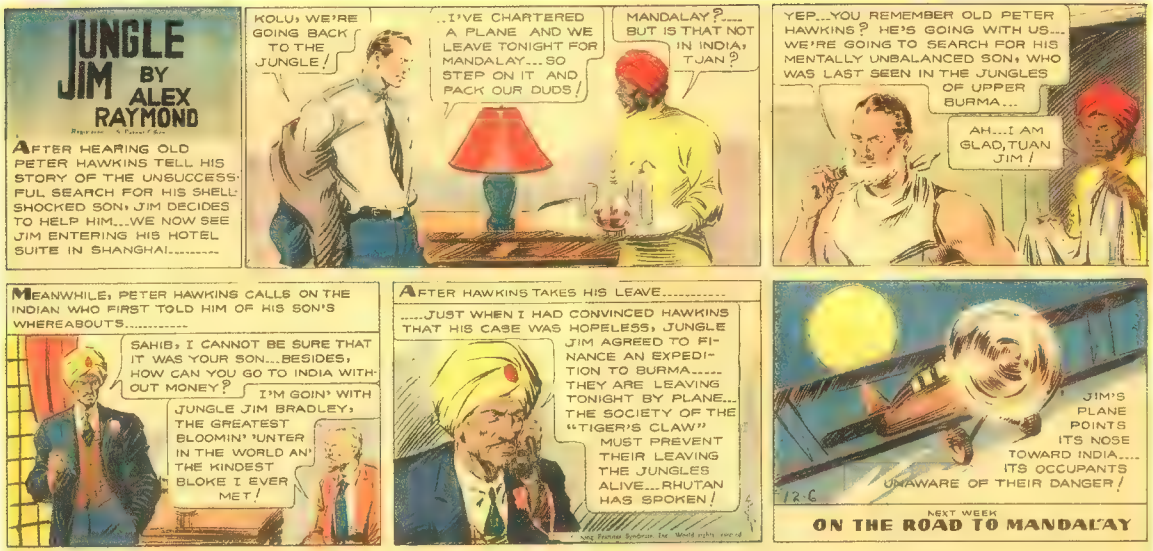
Simone: He reads comics, more now than ever. He's my best springboard, and has contributed ideas quite often. He knows how much I'm enjoying this, so he's happy with it, and very patient.

CBM: What comics are you currently reading?

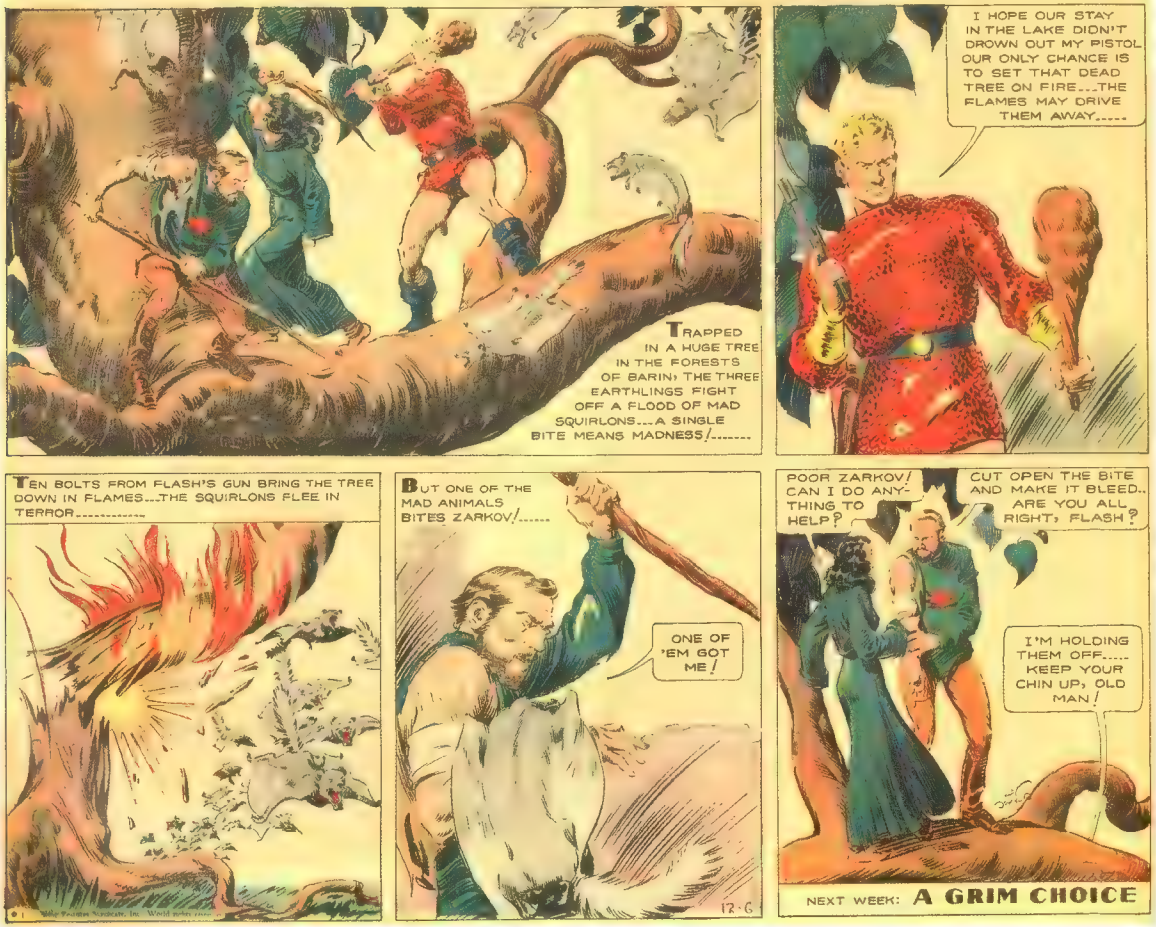
Simone: I tend to follow writers more than artists, so for me, it's pretty much the usual suspects: Bagge, Lutes, Ellis, Millar, Morrison, Waid, Rucka, Van Meter, Peyer, Winnick, Johns, Milligan, Ennis and Azzarello. Love *Scary Godmother*, *Belin*, *Hate* (when it comes out), *Rumble Girls*...too many to list. I'm buying an awful lot of Marvels for the first time in my own history. It's a great time to be a reader.

CBM: What else are you working on?

Simone: *Deadpool*, *Simpsons*, I had a short story for *X-Men Unlimited*, and have a *Punisher* thing coming up. Also, I'm prepping another creator-owned series for Oni, called *Kink*, about what a dangerous thing truth is, and how towns have life-spans. It should be very interesting, like a good late-night suspense film in black and white. There's a lot more for Oni, Bongo, DC and Marvel, but I can't announce it yet. One thing I'm definitely trying to do is write books that a wider audience can enjoy, no matter what company publishes it. You'll have to let me know if it worked out that way.


JUNGLE JIM BY ALEX RAYMOND
AFTER HEARING OLD PETER HAWKINS TELL HIS STORY OF THE UNSUCCESSFUL SEARCH FOR HIS SHELL-SHOCKED SON, JIM DECIDES TO HELP HIM...WE NOW SEE JIM ENTERING HIS HOTEL SUITE IN SHANGHAI.....
KOLU, WE'RE GOING BACK TO THE JUNGLE!
..I'VE CHARTERED A PLANE AND WE LEAVE TONIGHT FOR MANDALAY...SO STEP ON IT AND PACK OUR DUDS!
MANDALAY?..... BUT IS THAT NOT IN INDIA, TUAN?
YEP...YOU REMEMBER OLD PETER HAWKINS? HE'S GOING WITH US... WE'RE GOING TO SEARCH FOR HIS MENTALLY UNBALANCED SON, WHO WAS LAST SEEN IN THE JUNGLES OF UPPER BURMA...
AH...I AM GLAD, TUAN JIM!
MEANWHILE, PETER HAWKINS CALLS ON THE INDIAN WHO FIRST TOLD HIM OF HIS SON'S WHEREABOUTS.....
SAHIB, I CANNOT BE SURE THAT IT WAS YOUR SON...BESIDES, HOW CAN YOU GO TO INDIA WITHOUT MONEY?
I'M GOIN' WITH JUNGLE JIM BRADLEY, THE GREATEST BLOOMIN' 'UNTER IN THE WORLD AN' THE KINDEST BLOKE I EVER MET!
AFTER HAWKINS TAKES HIS LEAVE.....
.....JUST WHEN I HAD CONVINCED HAWKINS THAT HIS CASE WAS HOPELESS, JUNGLE JIM AGREED TO FINANCE AN EXPEDITION TO BURMA..... THEY ARE LEAVING TONIGHT BY PLANE... THE SOCIETY OF THE "TIGER'S CLAW" MUST PREVENT THEIR LEAVING THE JUNGLES ALIVE...RHUTAN HAS SPOKEN!
JIM'S PLANE POINTS ITS NOSE TOWARD INDIA.... ITS OCCUPANTS UNAWARE OF THEIR DANGER!
12-C
NEXT WEEK
ON THE ROAD TO MANDALAY

Flash Gordon


TRAPPED IN A HUGE TREE IN THE FORESTS OF BARIN, THE THREE EARTHLINGS FIGHT OFF A FLOOD OF MAD SQUIRLONS...A SINGLE BITE MEANS MADNESS!.....
I HOPE OUR STAY IN THE LAKE DIDN'T DROWN OUT MY PISTOL. OUR ONLY CHANCE IS TO SET THAT DEAD TREE ON FIRE...THE FLAMES MAY DRIVE THEM AWAY.....
TEN BOLTS FROM FLASH'S GUN BRING THE TREE DOWN IN FLAMES...THE SQUIRLONS FLEE IN TERROR.....
BUT ONE OF THE MAD ANIMALS BITES ZARKOV!.....
ONE OF 'EM GOT ME!
12-G
POOR ZARKOV! CAN I DO ANYTHING TO HELP?
CUT OPEN THE BITE AND MAKE IT BLEED.. ARE YOU ALL RIGHT, FLASH?
I'M HOLDING THEM OFF..... KEEP YOUR CHIN UP, OLD MAN!
NEXT WEEK: A GRIM CHOICE

JUNGLE JIM BY ALEX RAYMOND

Reg. U.S. Pat. Off.

AFTER WATCHING BHUTAN'S PLANE TAKE OFF FOR UPPER BURMA, LILLI DE VRILLE, DISGUISED AS AN INDIAN MAIDEN, REPORTS TO COLONEL R. D. H. SCOTT, OF THE INTELLIGENCE DIVISION OF THE BRITISH ARMY.....

I SHADOWED BHUTAN AS YOU ORDERED.. A LITTLE BEFORE MIDNIGHT, HE LEFT HIS HOTEL WITH A SERVANT AND CONSIDERABLE BAGGAGE..THEY ENTERED A WAITING CAR AND DROVE OFF..I HAILED A CAB AND FOLLOWED.....

PROCEED, PLEASE

...THEY STOPPED AT THE AIRPORT AND DASHED FOR A WAITING PLANE..A FEW SECONDS LATER, THEY TOOK OFF AND FLEW NORTHWEST....

DASH THE LUCK! TOO BAD YOU COULDN'T HAVE LEARNED THEIR OBJECTIVE...

YOU UNDERESTIMATE ME, COLONEL..I RETURNED TO BHUTAN'S CAR BEFORE IT LEFT THE AIRPORT AND MADE EYES AT THE CHAUFFEUR..HE TOLD ME THAT BHUTAN LEFT FOR UPPER BURMA!

EXCELLENT! YOU WILL LEAVE FOR BURMA AT ONCE!

IN THE JUNGLE...JIM PRESSES ONWARD IN HIS SEARCH FOR PETER HAWKINS' SON.....

A BRITISH PLANE, GUV' NOR

SO IT IS, HAWKINS

LITTLE DOES JIM REALIZE THAT THE PLANE HE WATCHES BEARS HIS FRIEND, LILLI DE VRILLE, TO GREAT DANGER IN UPPER BURMA!

NEXT WEEK ✳ TERROR !

Flash Gordon

LOST IN A SLIMY JUNGLE, FLASH AND DALE FIGHT TO FIND A WAY OUT.....

WE'LL JUST GO AHEAD IN A STRAIGHT LINE

IT LOOKS CLEARER AHEAD THERE, FLASH

I'M SINKING! QUICKSAND! HELP ME, FLASH!

DON'T STRUGGLE, DALE..YOU'LL GO DEEPER....

I..CAN'T MOVE!

FLASH PULLS DALE FREE AND THROWS HER TO FIRMER GROUND..BUT THE EFFORT BURIES HIM IN THE QUICKSAND!

FLASH..THROW ME YOUR GUN..QUICK, DON'T ARGUE..I'LL BLAST THIS VINE LOOSE.....

GOOD GIRL! TIE ONE END TO THE TREE..

WITH A SUPERHUMAN EFFORT, FLASH PULLS HIMSELF FREE FROM THE QUICKSAND.....

OH, DARLING..I NEARLY DIED WHILE YOU WERE IN THAT QUICKSAND!

THAT'S NOTHING, SWEETHEART... SO DID I!

ALEX RAYMOND'S
FLASH GORDON
THE COMIC STRIP AS EPIC FANTASY
Raymond A. Cuthbert
OUR ONLY CHANCE, DALE, IS TO REACH ARBORIA, BARIN'S FOREST KINGDOM.

Everyone who loves *Flash Gordon* has a story of when they discovered the strip. For Al Williamson, it was seeing a Buster Crabbe *Flash Gordon* serial just prior to the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941, which led him subsequently to the Raymond strip itself. For me, it was digging out some *Flash Gordon* Big Little Books from a box that my father had accumulated for my older brother and sister. This was probably around 1960, because I tended to just look at the artwork and look at the captions under the pictures, rather than reading the facing text page. Later as my reading skills improved, I read the text page as well.

My father sold that box of sixty Big Little Books some years later to a local comic collector for something like $60.00. My Dad asked me if it was all right to do that. I remember saying that it sounded like a lot of money—but could I keep the six or seven *Flash Gordon* BLBs? My Dad responded that those were the very ones that the local collector wanted the most—so, out they went.

Not long after, since I was a budding comic book collector, I marveled at the gigantic first edition of the Nostalgia Press *Flash Gordon and the Ice Kingdom of Mongo*, which my father, as the librarian for the Winnipeg Science Fiction Society, had imported for another fan. I had the chance to look over the book before the fan arrived to pick it up, and I fell in love all over again with the work of Alex Raymond on *Flash Gordon*. I was not yet a teenager at the time, and did not have enough money to buy the book for myself until it was re-released in 1971 in tandem with a companion volume, *Flash Gordon and the Water World of Mongo*, also from Nostalgia Press.

There has been a great deal of fan and professional ink spilled over the past few decades both on the art of Alex Raymond and the merits of *Flash Gordon*. Al Williamson, Larry Ivie and others have been amongst those who can do little but drool over the virtuosity of Raymond artwork. Other significant press has been from the more critical eyes of people like Maurice Horn, Ron Goulart and R.C. Harvey.

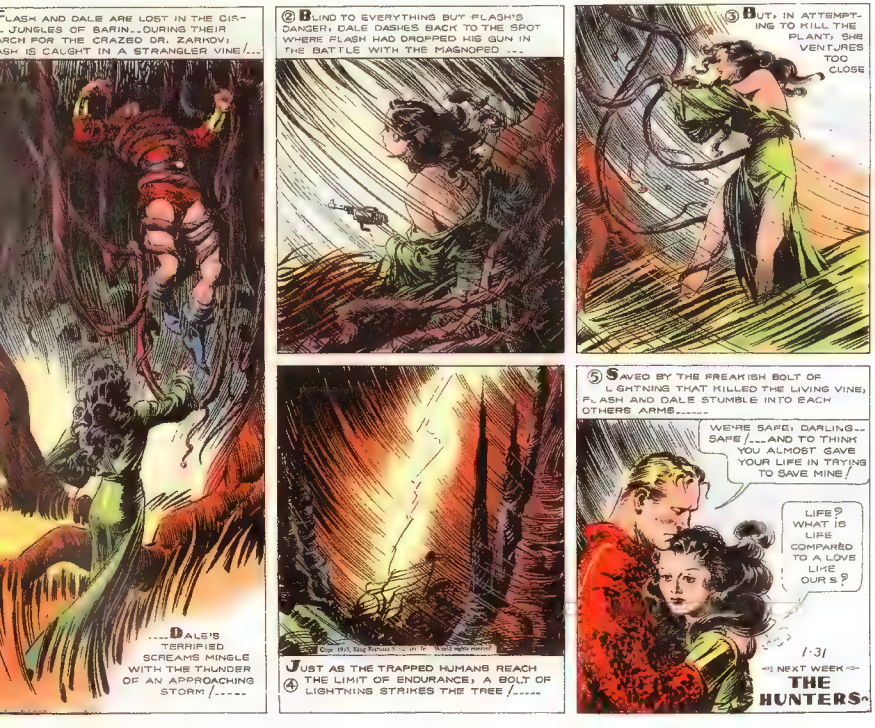
From these sources we have heard variously that Raymond was a *pioneer* who had no one to borrow his ideas from, or on the other hand, that much of the credit for the artistic wizardry that Raymond performed was due to the behind the scenes work of Austin Briggs. Briggs filled in for Raymond on a handful of Sunday strips during Raymond's tenure as its artist, drew the concurrent daily strip adventures of Flash from 1940 on while Raymond was drawing the Sunday strips for the character. Briggs took over for Raymond on the Sunday strip after Raymond's dropping the strip in order to join the Marine Corps in 1944.

Although Raymond had his share of artistic influences, I do not believe that his artwork on the strip depended on anyone save himself. He was too much of a purist about his artwork to allow his signature to appear over anybody else's work. The Sunday pages drawn by Briggs while Raymond had control of the strip (10/18/36, 11/11/36, 4/18/37, 7/24/38, 8/7/38,

8/21/38, 9/4/38, 10/30/38, 5/12/40 and 6/30/40) do not bear Raymond's signature. One of Briggs' Sundays during this period even has a Raymond paste-over on Flash's head because Raymond did not believe that Briggs got Flash's features quite right.

It has also been said in many circles that *everyone* looked at the strip for the art, and were thereby willing to excuse the poor storyline that Don Moore developed with Raymond for the strip. I believe that this is more fiction than fact, despite the fact that my hero Al Williamson has been quoted as holding to this position. Raymond's art *made* the strip, but the story carried on in quite an admirable fashion. I believe that the eventual story of Flash Gordon's struggle to overcome Ming became *the* epic of all adventure comic strips.

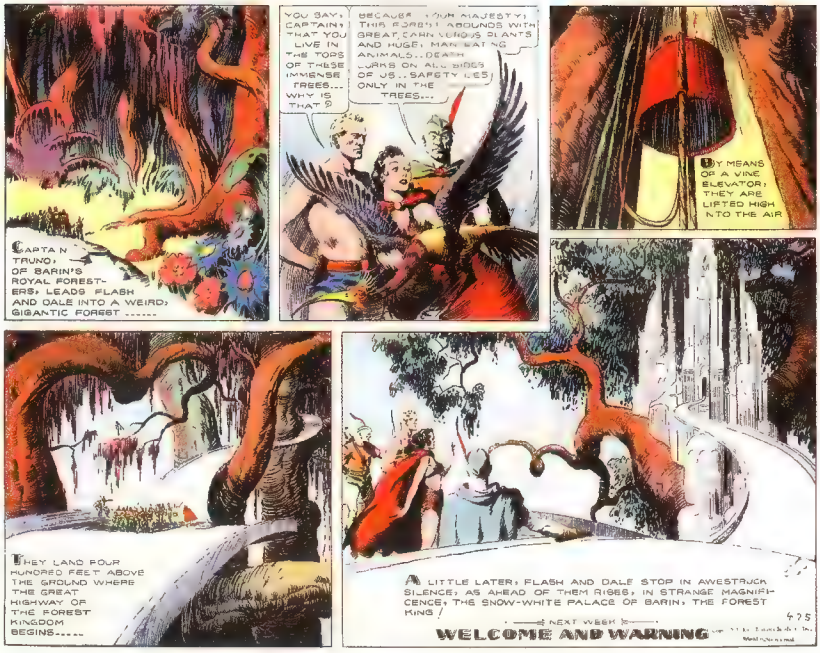
From my own vantage point, there is little question that *Flash Gordon* reaches its greatest heights beginning not long before Moore started working with Raymond on the strip. This period began in 1935. It continued at these lofty heights through Flash's long *French-Resistance* style war with Ming, which ended with Ming being toppled from the throne as the Emperor of Mongo. Although Williamson has stated that he most enjoys the storytelling in the pre-Moore strips with all their "anything can happen" qualities, I believe that Raymond's ideas were much better conveyed when the reins of the story were drawn in with the deliberate plotting of Don Moore. There is no question that the Moore/Raymond strips were far superior, *even merely on a storytelling basis* than were the Moore/Briggs story-lines which followed after Raymond's departure.


FLASH AND DALE ARE LOST IN THE DIS- JUNGLES OF BARIN...DURING THEIR ARCH FOR THE CRAZED DR. ZARKOV; ASH IS CAUGHT IN A STRANGLER VINE/...
---DALE'S TERRIFIED SCREAMS MINGLE WITH THE THUNDER OF AN APPROACHING STORM /-----
② BLIND TO EVERYTHING BUT FLASH'S DANGER, DALE DASHES BACK TO THE SPOT WHERE FLASH HAD DROPPED HIS GUN IN THE BATTLE WITH THE MAGNOPED ---
③ BUT, IN ATTEMPTING TO KILL THE PLANT, SHE VENTURES TOO CLOSE
JUST AS THE TRAPPED HUMANS REACH ④ THE LIMIT OF ENDURANCE, A BOLT OF LIGHTNING STRIKES THE TREE /-----
⑤ SAVED BY THE FREAKISH BOLT OF LIGHTNING THAT KILLED THE LIVING VINE, FLASH AND DALE STUMBLE INTO EACH OTHERS ARMS-----
WE'RE SAFE, DARLING-- SAFE /--- AND TO THINK YOU ALMOST GAVE YOUR LIFE IN TRYING TO SAVE MINE/
LIFE? WHAT IS LIFE COMPARED TO A LOVE LIKE OURS?
1-31
NEXT WEEK
THE HUNTERS

Is *Flash Gordon* melodrama or epic? Of course this is melodrama! It is a retelling, in a non-plagiaristic form, of the story of a Christ-like Messiah, or at least a Beowulf or Odysseus. Raymond's only contemporary rival in the illustrative manner of creating a comic strip was Hal Foster. Milton Caniff and Roy Crane's styles were so intentionally disparate from the efforts of Raymond and Foster that they must be considered on a different artistic plane. There are profound differences between Foster and Raymond's intentions as well, despite their mutual admiration of one another's work.

Foster's purpose in telling the story of *Prince Valiant* was

to take the tales of the Arthurian saga and make them into a living and breathing set of stories with a very idealistic, but nevertheless human protagonist in Val. As Foster often said, "In Val, I see an idealized version of myself, or the man I would like to be!" For Alex Raymond and Don Moore, *Flash Gordon* was the opposite kind of vision. Instead of taking a legend and making it human, Raymond and Moore were taking the human story into the parameters of the epic adventure.


CAPTAIN TRUNO, OF BARIN'S ROYAL FOREST-ERS, LEADS FLASH AND DALE INTO A WEIRD, GIGANTIC FOREST ------
YOU SAY, CAPTAIN, THAT YOU LIVE IN THE TOPS OF THESE IMMENSE TREES... WHY IS THAT?
BECAUSE, YOUR MAJESTY, THIS FOREST ABOUNDS WITH GREAT, CARNIVEROUS PLANTS AND HUGE, MAN-EATING ANIMALS... DEATH LURKS ON ALL SIDES OF US... SAFETY LIES ONLY IN THE TREES...
BY MEANS OF A VINE ELEVATOR, THEY ARE LIFTED HIGH INTO THE AIR
THEY LAND FOUR HUNDRED FEET ABOVE THE GROUND WHERE THE GREAT HIGHWAY OF THE FOREST KINGDOM BEGINS-----
A LITTLE LATER, FLASH AND DALE STOP IN AWESTRUCK SILENCE, AS AHEAD OF THEM RISES, IN STRANGE MAGNIFICENCE, THE SNOW-WHITE PALACE OF BARIN, THE FOREST KING!
NEXT WEEK
WELCOME AND WARNING

Foster's *Prince Valiant* always had a kind of painstaking thirst for realism and detail. His many trips to Europe to research the setting of the strip, the armor, and the like often pointed this out. Foster wanted his audience to know these things. He would often call attention to the fact that panel drawings were based upon such-and-so a visit to the site, right on the Sunday page that his readers were looking at. Raymond's vision for *Flash Gordon* was much more romantic than realistic. In its flavor, Raymond's work was much more attuned to the type of thing that J. Allen St. John (the premiere illustrator for the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs) was doing for the pulp magazines and books than it was to Foster's thirst for realism. Val could be injured, but could never die. As the *Flash Gordon* strip in 1938 would point out, Flash could die, but would rarely be disfigured by an injury!

Since I've mentioned Burroughs, I might say that he would have been one of the literary ancestors of Raymond and Moore's work of science-fantasy. It was Mac Raboy and Don Barry who, years later, would make the *Flash Gordon* strip into a science fiction strip, not Alex Raymond! Raymond and Moore were much more at home with fantasy in their telling of the strip. After all, this is where epic myths are formed!

The backgrounds for the *Flash Gordon* story have as much to do with such earlier heroes as the *Scarlet Pimpernel* and Johnston McCully's *The Mark of Zorro* as they do with Burroughs' John Carter. The heroes of all three sets of stories are people who manage to engage a populace with the dream of freedom. One might say that in this sense *Flash Gordon* can be understood as an idealized American tale. It is all about freedom and tyranny—a topic very current in the World War II days of Raymond's tenure on *Flash Gordon*.

As folks are likely aware, the youngster Alex Raymond debuted (after apprenticeship as a ghost artist for both *Blondie* and *Tim Tyler's Luck*) as a triple-threat to counter the competition from a rival syndicate. *X-9* was the counterpart for Chester Gould's *Dick Tracy*; *Flash Gordon* was the counterpart of *Buck Rogers*, and *Jungle Jim* was the counterpart of *Tarzan*. It is my opinion that Raymond's estimation of *Flash Gordon* grew as his talents flourished. If one were to compare Raymond's work on both *Flash Gordon* and *Jungle Jim* in 1934 and early 1935 with his concurrent work on the daily *Secret Agent X-9* I believe that he would be most remembered for *X-9*, if at all. It seems that the pairing with one of the

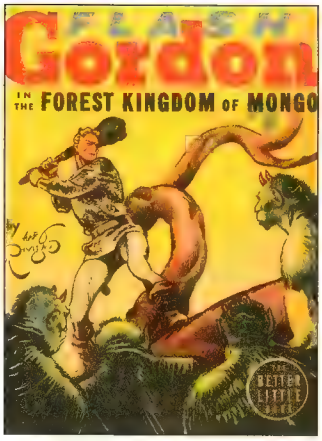
I HOPE WE CATCH UP WITH HIM THIS MORNING...
IF ONLY I DON'T LOSE HIS TRAIL...
AILING EIR CRAZED MRADE, ZAR- V, FLASH AND LE PUSH ON ROUGH THE REST.....
WHAT'S THAT? IT SOUNDS LIKE A DISTANT DRUM.... MORE ENEMIES?
NO...SOME OF BARIN'S PEOPLE.. HELLO-O-O!
THERE IS NO ANSWER, SO FLASH AND DALE HURRY TOWARD THE SOUND....
THOSE DRUMS CARRY FOR MILES...I HOPE WE FIND THE FOREST MEN...
I CAN'T HEAR IT ANY MORE..
T THE DISTANT CAMP, TRUNO SIGNALS KING BARIN.....
TELL BARIN THAT ZARKOV IS WORSE.. WE WILL PADDLE FULL SPEED TOWARD HOME...
HOURS LATER, FLASH AND DALE REACH THE LAKE SHORE.....
THE TRACKS LEAD UP TO THE WATER
YES...SOMEONE FOUND ZARKOV AND TOOK HIM IN A BOAT...BUT WHICH WAY DID THEY GO? IF WE CIRCLE THE LAKE, WE MAY PICK THEM UP AGAIN..
BUT THEIR DESPERATE ATTEMPT TO CIRCLE THE LAKE ENDS IN DISASTER...THEY BECOME LOST IN A DISMAL SWAMP!.....
1-3
NEXT WEEK:-
THE CLUTCH OF DEATH!

most renowned hard-boiled writers of his day, Dashiell Hammett, compelled Raymond to work even harder at his artistry than what he was doing for his two Sunday strips.

By the time that Flash has entered into the service of Azura the Witch Queen, Raymond had come into his own as the master artist he would continue to be for the rest of his career. Al Williamson states that Raymond's style seemed to change every six weeks or so. It is my belief that this constant change on Raymond's part continued right through his tenure on *Rip Kirby*, which was cut short by his death in an unfortunate automobile accident in 1956. It is also my belief that Raymond was constantly experimenting in this way so that his interest would continue to be piqued by constant challenges. This is another difference from Foster's approach, which was basically to attain a level of mastery of his craft and then to maintain it faithfully for over forty years.

I believe that Raymond's ability to grow and change was made possible by his collaboration with Don Moore. The struggle for freedom developed by Moore's plotting compelled Raymond to work even harder to develop *Flash* as an epic artistic poem to the human spirit and the quest for freedom. I believe that the work, as well as Raymond's artistic spirit made for one of the greatest achievements in all of comics.

In 1935 and 1936 Raymond experimented with various layouts which allowed him to show off an artistic *tour de force*. His style was using a great deal of dry brushwork, exemplified by Matt Clark and others. His panels were peopled by John LaGatta fashion plates and even, at times, positionings. Raymond rarely attempted a panoramic view of the kind which Foster did with gigantic panels in *Prince Valiant*,



but he did have a very strong sense of certain panels commanding the page. Joe Kubert has suggested that every page of comic art ought to have a *splash panel*—if not by size, then by composition. Raymond was one of the artists who likely taught this by example to Kubert.

The year 1937 begins with one of my favorite pages in all comic art (January 3rd). There is no dazzling layout here. Raymond has decided to pretty well limit himself to six panels per 2/3 Sunday page. In much the same way as Will Eisner found himself challenged and stretched by his seven-page limit on *The Spirit*, Raymond had confined himself to six panels per week.

The commanding image of the January 3, 1937 page is the bust-like image of Flash and Dale standing in the verdant untamed forest of Mongo. It is the central panel on the top tier, thus with the *Jungle Jim* topper present it would be the central image on the Sunday page. Dale is wondering whether they are about to face even greater danger, and Flash, in contrast, is confident, knowing that their salvation is indeed out ahead of them. Both Flash and Dale's physical appearance is the envy of their respective sexes, and the desire of the opposite sex. But Dale, reflecting the then-current stereotype of many women in fiction, is cautious and even fearful of the future. Flash, on the other hand, is ever the man who sees possibilities where others find none. He is the man who single-handedly has come from the heavens (or from our enlightened earth) to inspire an entire world of races that has been split into xenophobic and quarrelling fiefdoms by a malevolent mastermind.

Flash is rather a blind idealist when it comes to human nature. He is ever ready to forgive a former enemy or betrayer and in this sense he is like Burroughs' *Tarzan*. Burroughs used this overly optimistic view to allow his hero an *Achilles' heel* that could get him in and out of adventures in his novels. Both Foster and Burne Hogarth replayed this device *ad infinitum* in the *Tarzan* strip since there seemed to be no way around it. One of the reasons that Foster left *Tarzan* was because the hero was too much of a superman—one whom people like himself could not identify with. This also played a part in his moving away from the epic in *Prince Valiant* and making it a more human story.

I believe that Raymond was delighted with the prospect of creating an epic once he realized that this was becoming possible with the story he and Moore were creating. In Raymond's most oft-quoted statement, he said that the reason he decided to concentrate on the comic strip was because of the ability to be a creator of something with a unique vision. "I decided honestly that comic art is an art form in itself. It reflects life and times more accurately, and

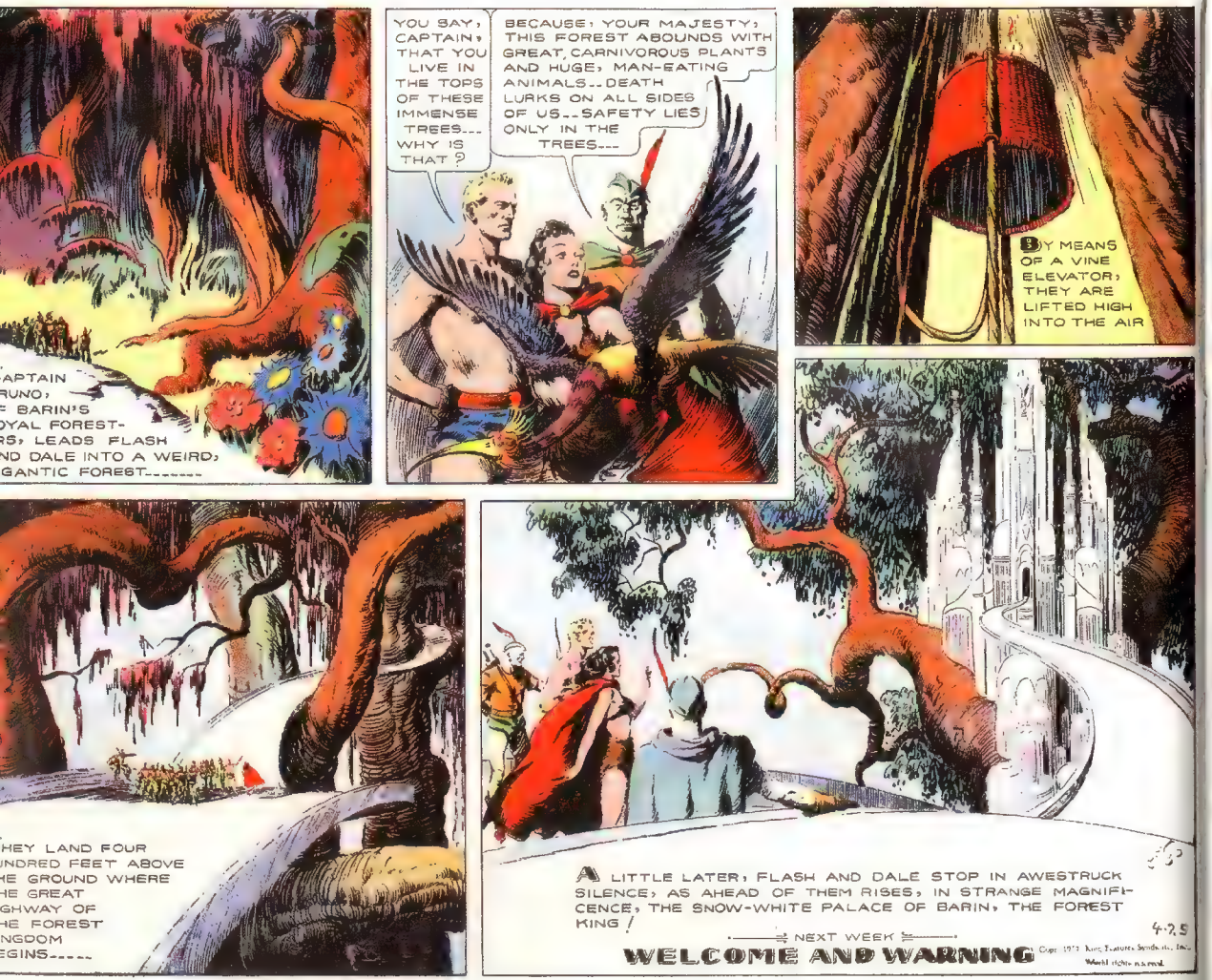
AL WILLIAMSON ON ALEX RAYMOND

by Steve Ringgenberg

Even at the tender age of ten years, I was aware of the elegance of *Flash Gordon*. I first met Flash in the Universal serial, and then I looked up the strip. I've always admired Raymond's drawing, his capability to draw classy comic strip panels.

When I approach Flash, I try to get as close to Raymond's style as possible, adding my own touches here and there. But let's face it, the stories that Raymond illustrated were pretty dull. Still, you can't lose the fact that the drawing was the first of its kind on that kind of stuff, and damn good, because he didn't have anybody to swipe. I mean, he did use reference here and there, but a lot of the stuff he had to make up.

I got to meet Raymond when I had just turned 18, in May of 1949. He spent two hours with me, which was awfully nice of him. I was so in awe of him that I really didn't ask questions, and later on, I realized, "Why didn't I ask him this? Why didn't I ask him that? Why didn't I ask him for an original? Why didn't I ask him for a job?" But he was a good egg, a nice guy. A real gentleman. He and Hal Foster were the gods of everyone, and both were very nice gentlemen.


APTAIN
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NGDOM
EGINS-----
A LITTLE LATER, FLASH AND DALE STOP IN AWESTRUCK SILENCE, AS AHEAD OF THEM RISES, IN STRANGE MAGNIFICENCE, THE SNOW-WHITE PALACE OF BARIN, THE FOREST KING!
4-25
NEXT WEEK
WELCOME AND WARNING

is more artistic than magazine illustration since it is entirely creative. An illustrator works with cameras and models; a comic artist begins with a white piece of paper and dreams up the whole business—he is playwright, director, editor and artist at once."

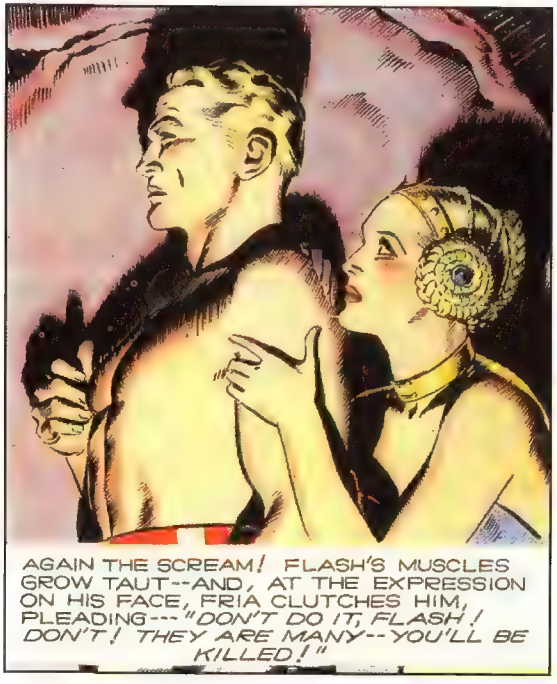
Flash falls prey to slave trading in 1937, while still in the primordial forest near the Cave Kingdom. But this primordial forest gives way to the Forest Kingdom of Prince Barin, the rightful heir to the throne of all Mongo, which had been usurped by Ming. Like the story of Joseph from the Book of Genesis, the slave trading leads to Flash's restoration of prestige and overly generous treatment of those who have betrayed him.

April 25, 1937 brings us to one of Raymond's influences—Franklin Booth. The grandeur of Raymond's Mongo cities, like the earlier sky city of the Hawkmen, owes much to Booth. This page shows to good effect one of Raymond's delightful cities. As opposed to the January 3rd's page where the central top tier commands the page, it is the final panel of this page which grabs our interest. Even Raymond had to push out the boundaries of this panel to make it serve our sense of awe. Pages like this one bring the Sunday page purists out of the woodwork, calling for the full-sized treatment that was afforded the Sunday pages in the '30s and '40s. Pages like this one, and many of Hal Foster's, truly push the horizons of what comic illustrative art can attain.

Throughout this period in Raymond's art we see both the simplicity and grace of his line. There is very little left of the influence of the pulp

artists he at times worked with. More and more as this period continues, the flamboyant brushwork which he had used to such great effect after March of 1935 is abandoned in favor of a fluid, rich bold-line inking style whose more modern-day equivalent can be seen in the mid 1970's work of Berni Wrightson and the present day work of Dave Stevens.

Since I have mentioned Dave Stevens here, this might be as good a place as any to comment on Raymond's women. Both Stevens (whose influence was Foster, rather than Raymond) and Raymond used model-work and photographs to some extent, and their dedication to their craft certainly shows, as does their fascination with beautiful women. Raymond's and Stevens' women have a sensuous appeal very different from the kind portrayed by Foster. Although Foster's Aleta was beautiful, she was *every inch a queen*...as Foster himself liked


AGAIN THE SCREAM! FLASH'S MUSCLES GROW TAUT--AND, AT THE EXPRESSION ON HIS FACE, FRIA CLUTCHES HIM, PLEADING---"DON'T DO IT, FLASH! DON'T! THEY ARE MANY--YOU'LL BE KILLED!"

to say. Raymond's queens were *every inch women*!

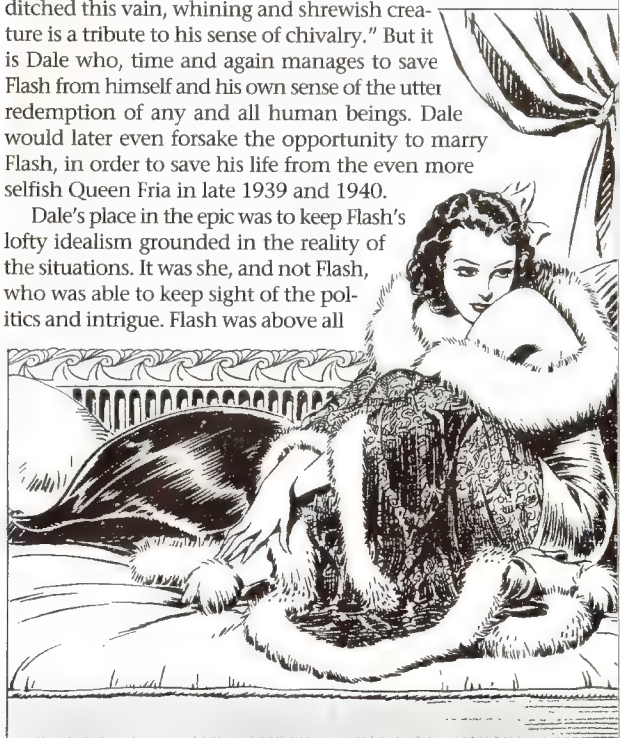
As Flash and Dale entered Barin's Forest Kingdom, we re-encounter another of Raymond's female characters, Aura, daughter of Ming, but now more attitudinally wife to Prince Barin. Raymond drew beautiful women, but he never seemed capable of leaving them villainesses. There is a whole string, beginning with 1934's Aura, and continuing through 1935's Azura, 1936's Undina, 1939's Fria, who begin life as scheming *femme fatales*, but who end their appearances as friends to Flash and his cause. The exception to this rule is Bulok's sister, Sonja, who betrays Flash, marries Ming, and is executed before she

has the opportunity to reform!

Raymond uses movie poses as a shortcut to suggest, rather than develop, the continuing sexual energy between Flash and Aura in 1937, but it is Dale, who in her vigilance for Flash's safety, prevents his assassination by the thief who Flash has believed once again was ready for reform.

As important an authority as Maurice Horn has stated that "Dale Arden might be the most dispensable, as well as most priggish, heroine in all of comicdom. That Flash hasn't ditched this vain, whining and shrewish creature is a tribute to his sense of chivalry." But it is Dale who, time and again manages to save Flash from himself and his own sense of the utter redemption of any and all human beings. Dale would later even forsake the opportunity to marry Flash, in order to save his life from the even more selfish Queen Fria in late 1939 and 1940.

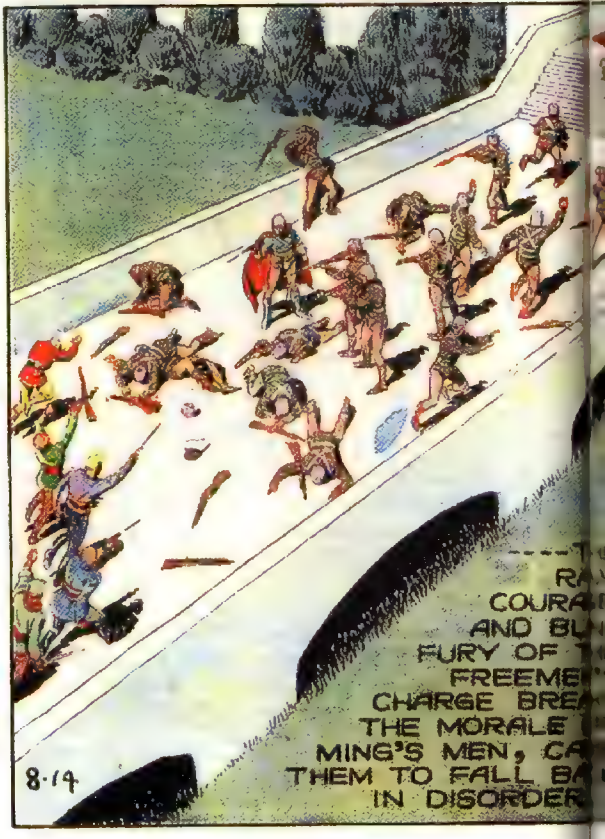
Dale's place in the epic was to keep Flash's lofty idealism grounded in the reality of the situations. It was she, and not Flash, who was able to keep sight of the politics and intrigue. Flash was above all



FLASH AND BULOK WATCH AS MING APPROACHES THE ISLAND OF THE ROYAL TOMBS TO BURY A RELATIVE-----

AN IMPRESSIVE CEREMONY, COLONEL--MOST FITTING FOR MY UNCLE. IT'S UNFORTUNATE THAT HE HAD TO DIE SO SUDDENLY--BUT THEN, HE SHOULDN'T HAVE PLOTTED TO SEIZE THE THRONE!

MING'S SUPERIOR WEAPONS TAKE A TERRIBLE TOLL----



this as the epic's iconic character. Dale's jealous desire to preserve Flash for herself nonetheless leads her to many selfless acts. If Dale at times seemed petty, she did manage to be a foil for the character of Flash himself. Flash may be an ideal, and Dale may be *all too human* in her nature, but together the two characters made a whole human being. Raymond and Moore used the two characters to develop their ideas of what society needed in order to be complete.

This leads once again to the discussion of the development of the main characters in the *Flash Gordon* strip. One of the most frequent complaints about the series was that none of Raymond's actors, even the primary players in the series, developed any character. They were merely draped with characteristics. Again, I would suggest that there was an appropriate subservience of character to the theme of the epic, which is essential to the story that Moore had to tell and that Raymond was more than capable of doing justice to. In addition, we need to ask whether in the confines of six panels per week, even for ten years, was there sufficient scope for character development? A master story-teller like Eisner proved it could be done with *The Spirit* in seven *pages* (not panels, but pages!) per week, but even Eisner would have had a difficult time in giving a persona to his lead characters because of the restrictions of the *heroic type*.

It is crucial to the overall purpose of the strip that character serve the theme of the epic story. Ming's vendetta against Flash and lust for Dale pitted him against Flash time and again.

In the most famous and oft-reprinted panel of the strip where Ming and Flash are dueling with crossed swords (8/14/38), Raymond and Moore provided the necessary answer to Kurtzman's academic question of "why does Flash use a sword rather than a zap gun?" Swords suit more closely the image of the epic struggle than does the *zap gun*. The technical answer would have

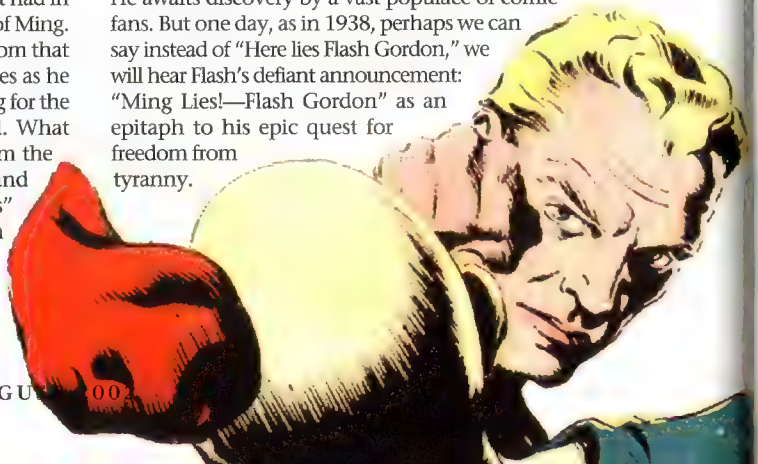
FLASH CRASHES THROUGH THE STRUGGLING MEN, DASHES UP THE STEPS AND---
---CROSSES SWORDS WITH MING, THE MERCILESS!
NEXT WEEK :-
A DANGEROUS PRISONER!

T WAS A COSTLY VICTORY--PAID FOR BY THE LIVES OF SUDIN, KUGOR AND MANY OTHERS. WE MUST PERSUADE MING'S ARMY TO JOIN US WITHOUT FURTHER BLOOD-SHED.
HEROES, LIKE SUDIN AND KUGOR, ARE GLAD TO DIE FOR THEIR COUNTRY, FLASH!
WITH MING, THE TYRANT, CAPTURED, FLASH AND HIS FRIENDS PLAN TO FREE MINGO---
"GENERAL LIN-CHU, LET US MEET UNDER A FLAG OF TRUCE TO DECIDE THE FUTURE OF MINGO!"
"I AGREE, FLASH GORDON, ON BEHALF OF MY EMPEROR!"
FLASH AND GENERAL LIN-CHU AGREE TO MEET ON A NEUTRAL ISLAND----
WE'LL LET MING LIVE AS AN EXILE IF YOUR ARMY WILL LET MINGO BECOME A REPUBLIC AND END THIS WAR---
I MUST TALK TO MING FIRST.
I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO TALK TO MING, THE MERCILESS--COULD YOU ARRANGE TO LET ME INTO HIS CELL?
---ER---
---AH---
ALL RIGHT, MISS SONJA.
MEANWHILE, BACK IN THE FREEMEN'S ISLAND HIDEOUT----
8-28
MUST I BE ANNOYED BY MEMBERS OF THIS REBELLIOUS RABBLE?
I THINK YOUR MAJESTY WILL BE INTERESTED IN MY SUGGESTIONS--YOU SEE, FLASH GORDON AND I NO LONGER AGREE---
NEXT WEEK:- TREACHERY!

been that the minor fiefdoms and rebels have very little access to the advanced weaponry that Ming's army used.

Flash's belief in the redemption of human character and in the value of freedom tells us what *Flash Gordon* is really all about. It is a cosmic drama, in more than the space-opera sense. It is my belief that quite possibly this is why Raymond's strip could never reach the importance it had in the two adventures he drew following the downfall of Ming. Ming was vanquished, and all that Flash could do from that time forth was to replay the same kind of adventures as he had already ultimately proven in his battle with Ming for the sake of the planet. The epic story had been told. What remained was to transplant the story of a hero from the heavens to earth in order to stop veiled Nazis and Japanese in the story of the "Red Sword Invaders" from 6/22/41 onwards, and then back to Mongo in what was a satisfying, but ultimately less engaging tale. Raymond's final engagement with Flash was a retelling of *Joan of Arc* combined with *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. Flash was once again saving a nation from tyranny, but after saving an entire planet, the saving of a nation seemed like a let-down.

Flash Gordon began 1938 with his own death and resurrection, yet another sign of the strip's epic aspirations. Alex Raymond's *Flash Gordon* is not yet dead in the 21st century. He awaits discovery by a vast populace of comic fans. But one day, as in 1938, perhaps we can say instead of "Here lies Flash Gordon," we will hear Flash's defiant announcement: "Ming Lies!—Flash Gordon" as an epitaph to his epic quest for freedom from tyranny.



A State of Grace

Alex Raymond 1935 to 1936

By Dave Winiewicz

The Debate

Whenever a discussion about Alex Raymond arises, invariably there also arises a debate as to which period represents his finest artistic efforts. One longtime collector (with a substantial collection of originals) maintains strenuously that early to mid-1934 is without question Raymond's finest period. He argues that the story was at its best, filled with wonder and a sense of infinite possibility; the artwork was a combination of charm and energy; the pace of the art complemented the story's vitality. Another collector maintains that the late 1937 and 1938 period is Alex's finest because here he is at his illustrational best. Each page is very finished, very slickly rendered. Another large group of art collectors maintains that 1939 is really Raymond's peak. The pages are large, dramatic and completely impressive. The return of the larger size pages brought back that epic sense to Raymond's brush. Another small group of devotees reasons that the years of *Rip Kirby* are his best. They argue that Raymond was more artistically mature and in total command of a multitude of techniques, all of which he used effectively. His mastery of chiaroscuro in the 1953-1956 period is, they maintain, unmatched. Furthermore, in *Rip Kirby* one never finds errors in figure drawing that are common in *Jungle Jim* and *Secret*

Agent X-9, wherein the infamous Raymond "shrunken head syndrome" seems prominent: figures with elongated bodies topped with smallish heads that are wildly out of proportion. This is often seen in the 1934-1935 period.

There are others who completely discount the work of Raymond, claiming that it is the large scale of the original art that overwhelms people, not its inherent quality. If the art were reduced in size, so also would be its impact. They point to the smaller format pages from the 1940s that lack convincing power. Flash is rendered far less heroically; his stature is diminished, consequently, his heroic presence is eliminated. The cosmic menace of Ming is replaced by the more mundane threat of Nazis.

This represents a small sampling of opinion about a body of work that is, at once, large in output and wildly diverse in style. To a large extent the conventional wisdom and prevailing opinion of Raymond's art is that 1935-1936 (in particular, 1935 through early 1936) is his golden period. This is also my sentiment, although it is important to keep in mind that we are speaking about comparative degrees of excellence here. I do not dismiss any period of Raymond's work as unimportant or insignificant. My intent in this article is not to analyze exhaustively all of Raymond's style changes, nor is it to cover comprehensively all his artistic output during the 1935-1936 period; I want to focus on his period of greatness and try to understand its aesthetic impact and its peculiar type of excellence. Precisely stated, why is 1935-1936 Raymond's finest artistic period? If the conventional wisdom is true, and I think it is, then there must be reasons. It is these reasons that I wish to unearth.

The World

Let me begin with a few words about the popularity of *Flash Gordon* (my primary focus). Social scientists maintain that the most obvious and pervasive characteristic of American society during the post-war years (WWII) is the growth of self-interest as our defining cultural feature. The monomaniacal pursuit of the dollar dominates and, ultimately, deadens life. The demands of the marketplace absorb all other concerns. Under the ever-increasing demands of the economic balance sheet our country has progressively become more venal, selfish, and overtly violent. The U.S. has the highest violent crime rate in the world, and more murders per capita than any other peacetime nation. This is not just fashionable academic cynicism, it is fact. Our society is brutal and savage. A glance at any newspaper will confirm this thesis time and time again. Sadly, the unspeakable has become commonplace.

On a more intimate scale, our typical work-a-day lives are often arid, barren, and filled with a stuporous sameness. Many people live lives of horribly crushing banality:

Man spends his life convulsed with anxiety or lethargic with boredom. **—Voltaire**

Inevitably and disturbingly, one realizes that time has a way of dampening passion, poetry,

and personal dreams. Life becomes diminished and is transformed into a series of stale repetitions—the same schedules, rituals, and duties:

Where is the life we have lost in living?
—T.S. Eliot

Many attempt to escape life's wooden stage and its heavy baggage of boredom by turning to literature, to art, to the creative domains. A renewal and recovery of purpose, significance and joy are often to be found there:

There is no cure for birth and death save to enjoy the interval. **—Robertson Davies/Canadian Author**

Great art is a natural anodyne to the world we find ourselves in. Art refreshes the soul and washes away the dust of daily life. We turn to a great adventure strip like *Flash Gordon* because of the world it presents us. Nostalgia for the experiences of childhood is often a search for a pure world, one devoid of grey areas, of continual compromise, of heroes prostituted by profit or engaged in some form of self-destructiveness.

The first duty of a gentlemen is to dream.
—Oscar Wilde

To have grown up with Flash Gordon (be it in newspaper, comics, or those exquisite serials with Buster Crabbe and Charles Middleton) is to have been exposed to a world of goodness and truth triumphing over evil and deceit:

Our eyes are educated from childhood on by the objects we see around us. **— Goethe**

FLASH GORDON
BY- ALEX RAYMOND
DALE IS BRINGING FOOD WHICH HER FELLOW SLAVE, KHAN, HAS POISONED--SEEING FLASH AT THE TABLE, AND NOT WISHING TO POISON HIM, SHE TRIPS HERSELF---
INSTANTLY, THE GUARD WOMAN IS OVER DALE, CUTTING VICIOUSLY WITH HER CRUEL WHIP---
DON'T BEAT THE GIRL--SHE COULDN'T HELP TRIPPING/
HO, GUARD/ BRING SLEEP GAS/
BEFORE THE GUARD CAN BRING HIS GAS-GUN INTO USE, FLASH DROPS HIM WITH THE FLAT OF HIS SWORD---
ARE WE TO BE FRIENDS OR ENEMIES, AZURA?
FRIENDS, FLASH--I'M SORRY I LOST MY TEMPER---
OH, DON'T YOU LOVE ME ANY MORE, FLASH?
WHY, I DON'T EVEN KNOW YOU, GIRL/
LATE THAT NIGHT, AS FLASH TOSSES IN TROUBLED SLUMBER, THE WITCH QUEEN TEACHES DALE---OBEDIENCE/
NEXT WEEK: "WAR IN THE CAVES"

Flash's world is one of true love, commitment, passion, freedom, chivalry, beauty, and justice. Exposure to such qualities in their pure state at an early age serves to fortify us with standards that become a permanent part of our character. It is precisely these qualities that emerge most forcefully in the Raymond of 1935-1936.

The Art

My chief desire when I look at something is to enjoy what I see. **—Bernard Berenson /Art Critic**

Search out strange peaks and make sketches of them. **—Personal Seal of Shih-t'ao, Chinese artist**

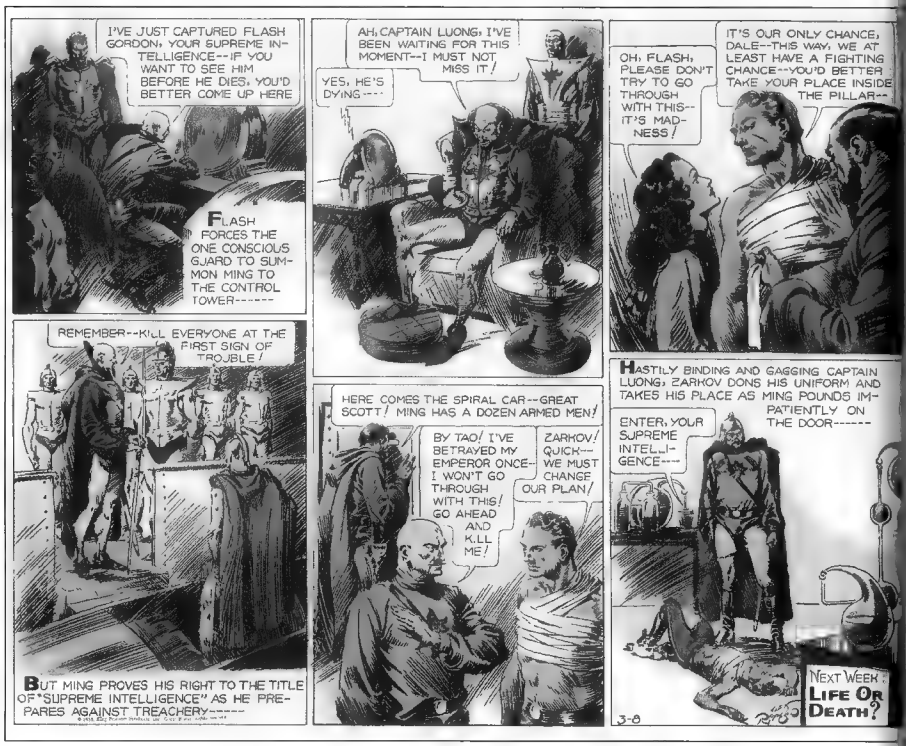
Raymond's artwork during 1935-1936 is, quite simply, spectacular. His art changed dramatically

beginning with the "Tournaments of Mongo" sequence, especially 12/2/34 onward. Prior to this, a standard *Flash* page was composed of a number of flat, horizontal rectangles organized in a compressed, four-tier arrangement. This highly standardized and restrictive compositional structure limited Raymond's natural tendency toward figures of more heroic proportion. The figure of Flash Gordon in the 1934 period is somewhat diminutive and stunted. Once Raymond began to change the page's configuration, his art and, in particular, his figure compositions took on a new stature, a more heroic "look." Raymond begins to blossom in the "Tournaments" sequence and continues to grow throughout the famous "full page" Sundays (i.e. from 2/3/35 to 6/23/35) with their virtuoso use of dry brush techniques and, later, simply the pen (e.g. 6/2/35, the finest looking of all the Raymond originals). The handsome, statuesque and heroic Flash we have all come to admire was developed in this period. A heightened visual sophistication appears; the pages take on a more elevated and serious tone. Even the new title banner's words (i.e. we sing of arms and heroes) echo the words of Shakespeare's King Lear as he comforts Cordelia (V, iii):

"...So we'll live, And pray, and sing, and tell old tales..."

There is a definite change in artistic tone from the often silly frivolousness of 1934 to the awakening high-mindedness of 1935. Raymond became aware of the potential of his new creation. Undoubtedly, highlighting Flash in his own full-page format inspired Raymond to new heights.

My personal collection contains several Raymond originals from his prime period, e.g. *Flash Gordon* 3/8/36 and 2/23/36. I have been able to view many, many examples of Raymond's originals from all his years. My comments on his art are based on long contemplation of the originals, not just on the printed pages or reprint books. Let us look a little closer at the story and the art.


I'VE JUST CAPTURED FLASH GORDON, YOUR SUPREME INTELLIGENCE--IF YOU WANT TO SEE HIM BEFORE HE DIES, YOU'D BETTER COME UP HERE
FLASH FORCES THE ONE CONSCIOUS GUARD TO SUMMON MING TO THE CONTROL TOWER------
AH, CAPTAIN LUONG, I'VE BEEN WAITING FOR THIS MOMENT--I MUST NOT MISS IT/
YES, HE'S DYING----
IT'S OUR ONLY CHANCE, DALE--THIS WAY, WE AT LEAST HAVE A FIGHTING CHANCE--YOU'D BETTER TAKE YOUR PLACE INSIDE THE PILLAR--
OH, FLASH, PLEASE DON'T TRY TO GO THROUGH WITH THIS--IT'S MADNESS/
REMEMBER--KILL EVERYONE AT THE FIRST SIGN OF TROUBLE/
BUT MING PROVES HIS RIGHT TO THE TITLE OF "SUPREME INTELLIGENCE" AS HE PREPARES AGAINST TREACHERY------
HERE COMES THE SPIRAL CAR--GREAT SCOTT/ MING HAS A DOZEN ARMED MEN/
BY TAO/ I'VE BETRAYED MY EMPEROR ONCE--I WON'T GO THROUGH WITH THIS/ GO AHEAD AND KILL ME/
ZARKOV/ QUICK--WE MUST CHANGE OUR PLAN/
HASTILY BINDING AND GAGGING CAPTAIN LUONG, ZARKOV DONS HIS UNIFORM AND TAKES HIS PLACE AS MING POUNDS IMPATIENTLY ON THE DOOR------
ENTER, YOUR SUPREME INTEL...I-GENCE---
NEXT WEEK: LIFE OR DEATH?
3-8

I FOUGHT THEM OFF, BUT THEY ESCAPED THROUGH THAT CREVICE WITH FLASH -- HE WAS UNCONSCIOUS -- OR WORSE
THEN THEY BLOCKED IT WITH A HUGE STONE --AS SOON AS THE ADVANCE GUARD ARRIVES, WE'LL BLAST THE CREVICE OPEN AGAIN----
AT THAT MOMENT A SENTRY SIGNALS THE APPROACH OF FLASH'S ARMY OF HAWKMEN AND CUFFMEN---
A QUICK-FIRING NITRO GUN IS SWUNG INTO POSITION -- THERE IS A FLASH AND A ROAR! ---A GREAT GAP APPEARS IN THE TUNNEL WALL---
COOKS! HERE'S MEAT---A FEAST---
MEANWHILE, THE LIZARD MEN COME TO A FORK IN THE TUNNEL---THE CREATURES CARRYING FLASH TAKE THE RIGHT HAND TURN AND THE REST GO TO THE LEFT --
THIS HEAD COOK SLEEPFULLY SHARPENS THE BARBS OF A HUGE FORK---
MANY TRACKS THAT WAY---?
YES, TOO MANY TRACKS, THAT'S WHY I THINK THEY TOOK FLASH DOWN THIS PASSAGE---
RIGHT DALE--HAWKMEN--! HALF OF YOU FOLLOW ZUR, THE REST FOLLOW ME---FORWARD!
NEXT WEEK: "BLOCKED"

tions, stereotypes, and their actions are correspondingly stereotypical. This is not to demean them or lessen their importance. Stereotypes are often necessary instruments for communication, especially when a mass medium is involved. The visual arts rely on these archetypes to express character and mood; an allegorical dimension is often present. Each figure performs what it is typed to do. Flash, Dale, and Zarkov are a trinity of brawn, beauty and brains. Ming is alien chaos, the element of order-destroying indeterminacy. As fully functioning metaphors they have no need of further depth or complexity. The newspaper strip format precludes the possibility of investigating wider horizons of feeling, or intricate psychological depth and complex motivations.

Such, and so magnifying, is the virtue of a large and liberal theme! We expand to its bulk. To produce a mighty book, you must choose a mighty theme.
—Moby Dick (Ch. The Fossil Whale)

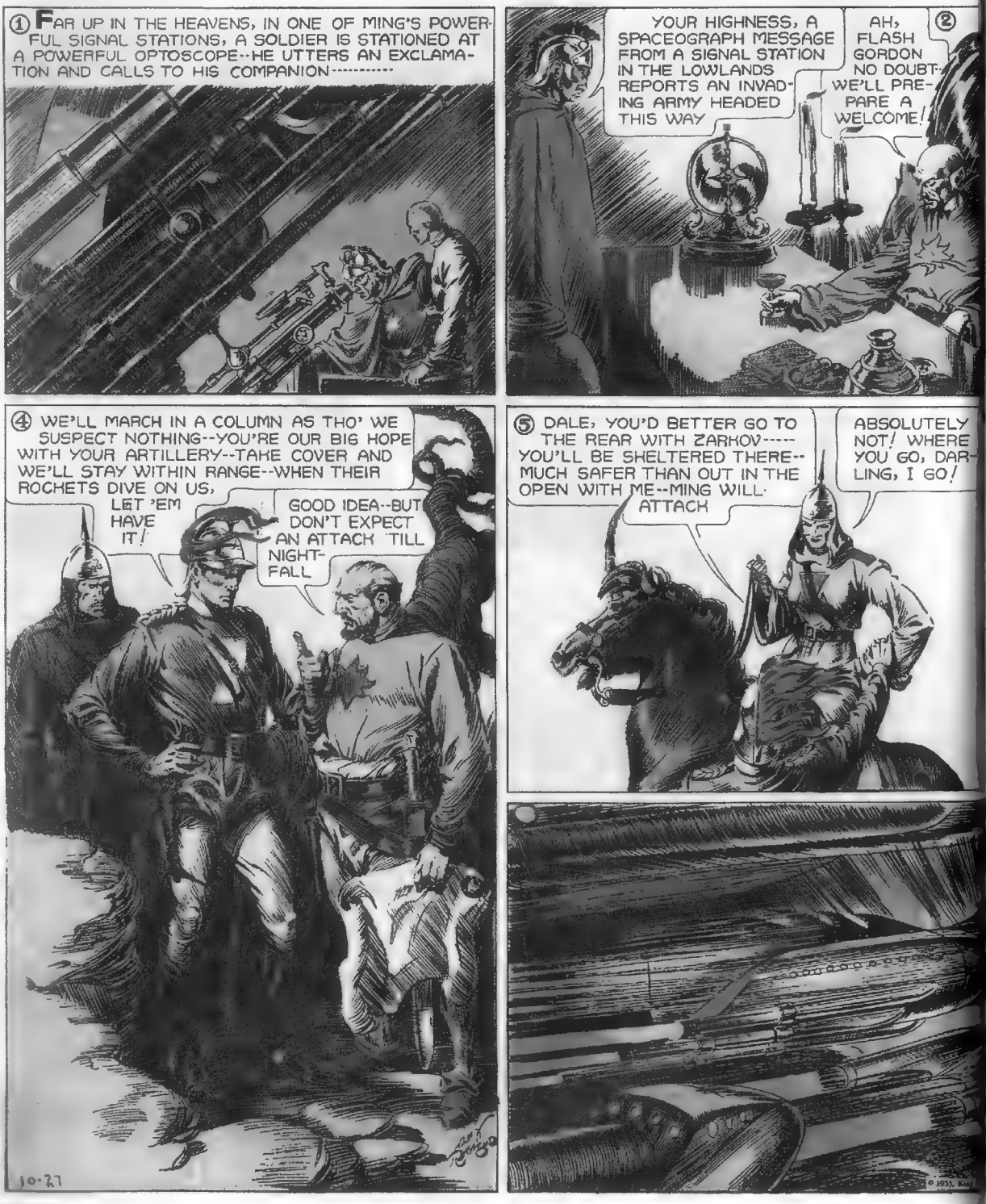
Story and Art

For many years I was somewhat taken aback by the large stock of conventionalized poses that Raymond utilized, especially in 1935 and continuing throughout the life of the strip. An example is the melodramatic and ubiquitous Flash /female face-to-face meeting. Examples of this occur in 4/14/35, 6/2/35, 9/8/35 and scores of other strips. This type of pose always impressed me as a cheap, overemphatic, derivative and altogether stagy mannerism. However, upon further consideration I have come to the conclusion that this type of presentation is completely fitting. After all, it is important not to lose sight of our context, namely, Flash Gordon is actually an opera of sorts, a space opera to be sure, but operatic in the grand confrontation of good and evil that energizes the plot. This scale demands equally grand and expansive operatic gestures. This is what Raymond provides us.

The characters within this drama function as almost rhetorical abstrac-

When these stereotypes are successfully manipulated, then the characters can leap over time and into our everyday mythology, our collective cultural consciousness. Witness the impact of the great Westerns of John Ford or Sergio Leone,

QUEER--CAN'T REMEMBER WHO I AM--AND I HAD TO DO SOMETHING----SAVE SOMEBODY--------
DON'T WORRY, MY SOLDIER PRINCE--- YOU KNOW ME, YOUR QUEEN, AZURA------


① FAR UP IN THE HEAVENS, IN ONE OF MING'S POWERFUL SIGNAL STATIONS, A SOLDIER IS STATIONED AT A POWERFUL OPTOSCOPE--HE UTTERS AN EXCLAMATION AND CALLS TO HIS COMPANION----------
YOUR HIGHNESS, A SPACEOGRAPH MESSAGE FROM A SIGNAL STATION IN THE LOWLANDS REPORTS AN INVADING ARMY HEADED THIS WAY
② AH, FLASH GORDON NO DOUBT--WE'LL PREPARE A WELCOME!
④ WE'LL MARCH IN A COLUMN AS THO' WE SUSPECT NOTHING--YOU'RE OUR BIG HOPE WITH YOUR ARTILLERY--TAKE COVER AND WE'LL STAY WITHIN RANGE--WHEN THEIR ROCHETS DIVE ON US,
LET 'EM HAVE IT!
GOOD IDEA--BUT DON'T EXPECT AN ATTACK 'TILL NIGHT-FALL
10-27
⑤ DALE, YOU'D BETTER GO TO THE REAR WITH ZARKOV----- YOU'LL BE SHELTERED THERE--MUCH SAFER THAN OUT IN THE OPEN WITH ME--MING WILL ATTACK
ABSOLUTELY NOT! WHERE YOU GO, DARLING, I GO!

3 BUT FLASH GORDON, LEADING HIS ARMY, SEES THE SIGNAL STATION AND ORDERS A MAN TO THE REAR FOR DR. ZARKOV----------
AS NIGHT FALLS, A VAST FLEET OF ROCKETS ROARS INTO THE STRATOSPHERE AND HEADS TOWARD FLASH'S INVADING ARMY! —NEXT WEEK— THE MAELSTROM!

or the detective genre of Hammett and Raymond Chandler. Cliché does not have to preclude substance or impact. Flash Gordon has also taken up residence there, along with Sherlock Holmes, Superman, Don Quixote, Dracula, and many other secular icons. Flash, Dale, Ming, and Zarkov will endure and play out their poetic drama for generation upon generation to come:

You know it's poetry when it takes the top of your head off —**Emily Dickinson**

We all know that feeling. It is the Raymond of 1935-1936 that dramatizes, highlights and defines this myth. It is the art that serves to awaken us and casts a profound and lasting aesthetic aura around each Sunday page. It has been said, and rightly so, that art is a world seen through a temperament:

Art is valuable not just for its ideas but for the world that art created, a world that could be contemplated and explored but not understood scientifically. —**Marshall McLuhan**

Raymond's art has that magical, multi-layered expressiveness and infectious power to open the gates to the imagination. We take great delight in contemplating the strange world of Mongo and all its denizens:

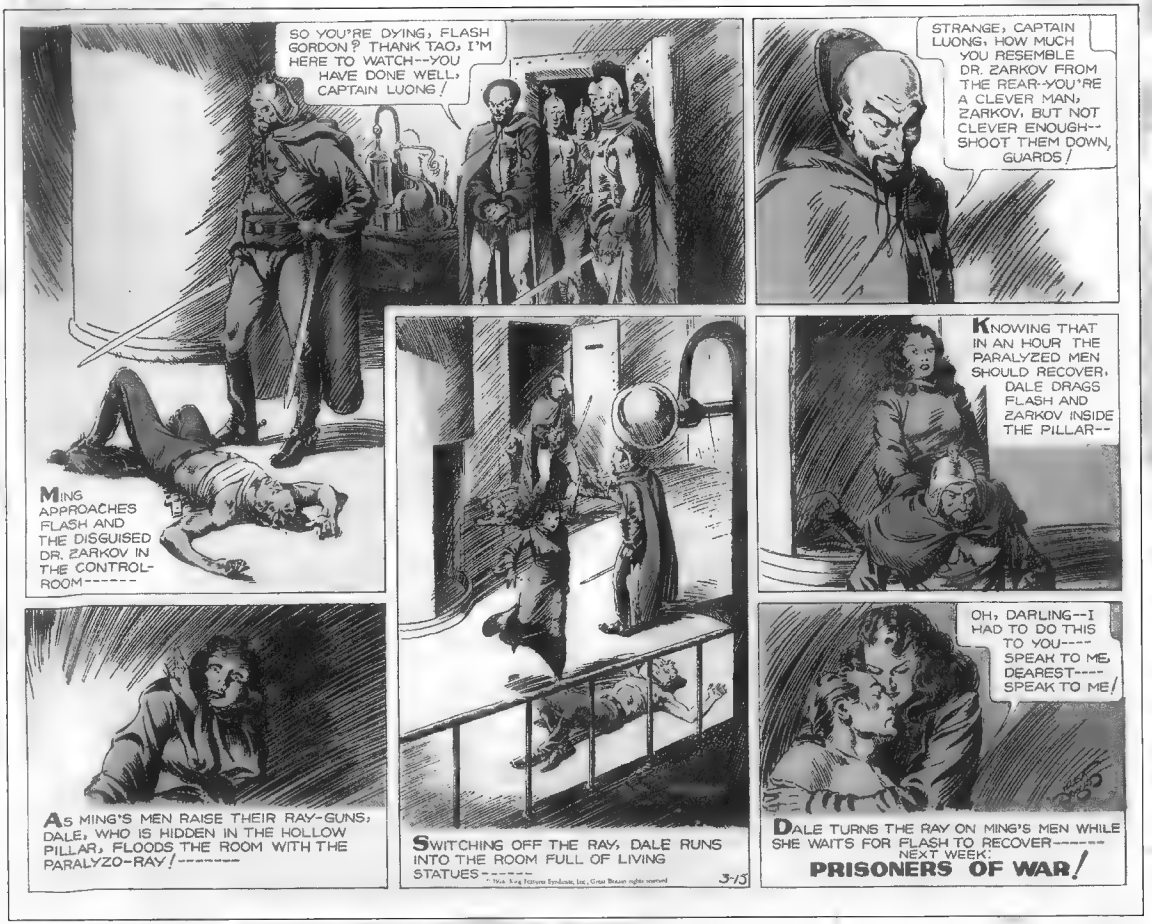
How spontaneously our childlike excitement is aroused by the mere notion of a secret world. —**Emily Dickinson**

Raymond's style is his vision, how he conceives this imagined world and expresses it with pen and brush and ink.

In fact, all good and genuine draftsmen draw according to the picture inscribed in their minds, and not according to nature. —**Baudelaire**

What is the secret of artistic presence? Some works affect us deeply; others leave us numb, uninvolved, and unmoved. In Raymond's case, we absorb a quality of his personality. The mysterious magic of art is that lines can enliven us. Raymond's style in 1935-1936 conveys a special quality:

DALE'S HEART SINKS AS SHE SEES FLASH AT THE TABLE WITH THE WITCH QUEEN, READY TO PARTAKE OF THE DISH OF DEATH!
NEXT WEEK: "REBELLION"!
5-26


SO YOU'RE DYING, FLASH GORDON? THANK TAO, I'M HERE TO WATCH--YOU HAVE DONE WELL, CAPTAIN LUONG!
STRANGE, CAPTAIN LUONG, HOW MUCH YOU RESEMBLE DR. ZARKOV FROM THE REAR-YOU'RE A CLEVER MAN, ZARKOV, BUT NOT CLEVER ENOUGH--SHOOT THEM DOWN, GUARDS!
MING APPROACHES FLASH AND THE DISGUISED DR. ZARKOV IN THE CONTROL-ROOM------
KNOWING THAT IN AN HOUR THE PARALYZED MEN SHOULD RECOVER, DALE DRAGS FLASH AND ZARKOV INSIDE THE PILLAR--
AS MING'S MEN RAISE THEIR RAY-GUNS, DALE, WHO IS HIDDEN IN THE HOLLOW PILLAR, FLOODS THE ROOM WITH THE PARALYZO-RAY!-------
SWITCHING OFF THE RAY, DALE RUNS INTO THE ROOM FULL OF LIVING STATUES-----
OH, DARLING--I HAD TO DO THIS TO YOU---- SPEAK TO ME, DEAREST---- SPEAK TO ME!
DALE TURNS THE RAY ON MING'S MEN WHILE SHE WAITS FOR FLASH TO RECOVER------
NEXT WEEK:
PRISONERS OF WAR!

Once a style is evolved it is thought of as a simple thing, but style not only evolves through a method. It evolves through feeling. It is like laying a brush to canvas in a certain way and if you're not living along the path of power and flow, style vanishes.

—Charles Bukowski /
Upon the Mathematics of the Breath and the Way

It is often the style that beguiles us and whisks us away to flights of delicious fancy. The forms and the figures he renders become the vehicles for their character:

What a mistake it is to think that drawing means accuracy! Drawing means the will to create a form: the more powerful and reasoned the will, the more beautiful the drawing.

—Max Jacob—Art Poetique (Paris, 1922)

There will always be an audience hungry for excellent draftsmanship. This is partially fueled by the bulk of so-called modern fine art turning its collective back on the craft of drawing. Here is the typical attitude from one of the modern art "giants":

I think I'm painting a picture of two women, but it may turn out to be a landscape.

—Willem deKooning, Anecdotes of Modern Art, p.311

Contrary to this almost irrational approach, Raymond's Flash of 1935-1936 is continually depicted with dignity, elegance, valor, an ease of limb and visible nobility. All these qualities are part of the form and emerge from his lines; Flash is bold, confident, and incisive. When Raymond depicts Ming, every line is envenomed; his expression is concentrated, controlled, viperous. The stainless character of Flash is the counterpoint to the evil, anti-white and anti-human Ming. The clash between Flash and Ming is timeless, a confrontation of will, cunning, strength and intelligence. The staging of this battle resonates with echoes of ancient values. For example, the Tournament sequence harkens back to ancient times when athletic contests were religious and cultural events of importance. Often a new political ruler would emerge because of his athletic prowess and resultant success on the field. During these times political leaders were not merely titular heads of state but took direct and personal responsibility in their execution of military duties. Ming fits into this role. His war with Flash occurs on both a cerebral and phys-

ical level. Mongo is a technologically sophisticated world of ray guns and rocket ships, yet Flash and Ming have a personal duel with swords (See *Flash* 8/14/38). Some writers maintain that this is incongruous, ridiculous, even stupid. Hardly. Raymond is honoring and utilizing a long tradition of personal dueling that depends on individual strength and talent. The strongest and the quickest will prevail. So teaches the so-called "cult of the sword" that was an important structural element in many societies. Here is a world of honor and attainment by merit. How we respond to this vanished time...and long for it.

Raymond deliberately selects line and shape with a view to establishing the qualities of this created world, and to highlight the roles of evil, dignity and heroism. These qualities are never more present than in this 1935-1936 period. How many attempt to capture these qualities, but come nowhere near to success. Raymond has attained a special plateau of accomplishment in the 1935-1936 *Flash Gordon*.

Each Raymond page in this period is beautiful, resplendently so. This is, clearly, another dominant feature of this time. It has often been stated, from the time of Plato on, that rhythm, harmony and grace are three of the elements comprising Beauty. Raymond's work has all this in abundance. During 1935-1936, especially the "War with Ming" sequence roughly from 7/28/35 through 4/5/36, Raymond's line has an almost translucent, three-dimensional quality. The inking is not merely black but has a tonal depth impossible to describe. Its effect is magical:

When you understand the life of his line you will possess his beauty of life. —**Marcel Proust**

I find a profundity in his work during this period, and only in this period. A profound display of the noble, heroic and romantic virtues with Beauty as the constant attendant. Compared to this plateau, his later work (1937-1939) is weakly conventional, almost static, by contrast. Consider the sequence 3/8/36 to 3/22/36. I have seen all these originals; they are lavishly textured, gracefully executed, hypnotic in effect and visually ravishing. The brushstrokes explode

FLASH FINALLY RECOVERS FROM THE PARALYZO-RAY-------
DALE, DARLING, IF IT WASN'T FOR YOUR QUICK WIT, MING WOULD HAVE KILLED ALL OF US!
I HATED TO PARA-LYZE YOU AND ZAR-KOV, BUT IT WAS THE ONLY WAY
AS ZARKOV COMES TO, DALE TURNS OFF THE RAY--THEY EMERGE FROM THE PILLAR AND BIND MING'S SOLDIERS
WHILE YOU'RE DOING THAT, I'LL RESUME MY DISGUISE AS ONE OF MING'S COLONELS
SO, FLASH GORDON--- YOU HAVE TRICKED ME!
NO, MING--DALE TRAP-PED YOU--A GIRL TAKES MONGO'S EMPEROR PRISONER!
NOW, MY FRIEND, YOU'LL ESCORT US OUT OF YOUR CITY OR YOU'LL DIE RIGHT HERE!
I REFUSE! YOU FOOL EARTH-MEN WOULD NEVER KILL A PRISON-ER--YOU'RE TOO CHICKEN-HEARTED!
NO USE, ZARKOV--
THIS IS THE ONLY WAY!
PRETENDING TO BE GUARDED BY THE UN-CONSCIOUS MING, THEY ENTER THE SPIRAL CAR--FLASH STARTS THE ROCKETS AND THEY ROAR DOWN THE INCLINE-----
NEXT WEEK: DISASTER!

with emotion, mood and character. The lines create a special atmosphere, a special world, a world of nobility, dignity, grace and the ever-present threat of evil. Ming moves through this sequence with the eyes of a baleful serpent, ready to strike out savagely at any time. The dark presence of Ming seems to lurk in the crosshatched shadows; such is the magic of Raymond's brush. In 3/8 the essence of Ming's character emerges as supremely noble and terrible. In 3/15 the deadness of his eyes mirrors the deadness of his soul. Our truculent mandarin is finally dispatched in 3/22 with a well-placed punch to the jaw. Each of these pages is magisterial; every line is a flow of soul:

A line should have the vibration of a musical sound
—Gertrude Stein

Raymond's pages are veritable symphonies, a grand opera of the human spirit presented to the eye for its edification. All this grand emotional effect is accomplished by the seemingly effortless graceful harmony of lines. The careful placement and coordination of his brushstrokes are inimitable. This period has never been copied; it can't be; it is *sui generis*. This is the distinctive and matchless rhythm that a great master can attain when at the full height of his powers.

Consider Raymond's signature for a moment. A long oriental tradition in art holds that art and calligraphy are identical. An artist's signature is considered as important as his composition. Has there ever been a more rhythmic signature than Alex Raymond's? It is, at once, self-conscious, confident, and supremely audacious. His signature is a tiny world unto itself, festooned with swirls of emphasis, a self-involving arabesque of ink, tone and living line. Contemplating his signature alone hearkens us back to the world of medieval scribes and the manuscript tradition built on the power and beauty of the "distinctive hand." How different this is from the inartistic uniformity provided by typewriters, computers, matrix dot printers, and word-processors. Again, an earlier world of personal style and artistic grace resonates from his signature.

Let me highlight another difference between this period and later periods, namely, the distinction between "beautiful" and "pretty." Depth of feeling in any art production is a good key to the presence of beauty. The forms and figures should not, in any sense, act as barriers but should draw us in, seduce the eye, induce a profounder level of felt life, of mystery. The limitless horizons of suggestiveness should always be present:

Prettiness is all that remains of beauty when the permanent causes of the sensation are removed.
—Bernard Berenson /Art Critic

The beautiful contains the unknowable.
—Henri-Pierre Roche'

When art does not go beyond surface detail, superficial characteristics, then what remains is decorative or, perhaps, a slightly stale prettiness. This type of dross is fairly common. Weak attempts at representing heroism, love or nobility adorn most paperbacks, book

covers and movie posters. A whole dimension is missing. Only the surface is presented; no contact is made with the imaginative forces underneath. These are the forces that hold us vitally engaged when viewing, for example, the Flash 3/8-3/22 sequence. The later Raymond loses some of that evocative magic, that almost palpable feeling of mystery and romance and adventure that envelopes everything. This is replaced by a slick proficiency which is, at once, superficially fascinating and yet, ultimately, far less satisfying. The Raymond of 1935-1936 is special and completely remarkable; it is sheer brilliance. Later years are often so visually glib, so slick, so finished that they exhaust reflection. Consider, for example, that famous picture by Albrecht Durer titled "The Great Piece of Turf." It is so precisely observed, so richly detailed, that it impedes our imagination. We are not brought into the picture because the detail overwhelms us. There is nothing left to suggest, no qualities or responses to evoke. The visual atmosphere of the later Raymond is similar. My guess is that this is caused by his increasing reliance on photographs as reference. Ron Goulart (*CBG*, 10/7/88, p. 20) maintains that he has seen Raymond's collection of movie stills and that the movies of the 1930s progressively influenced costumes, palaces, landscapes, and poses in the strip. Obviously his transcriptions from photos became more and more literal, less and less poetic.

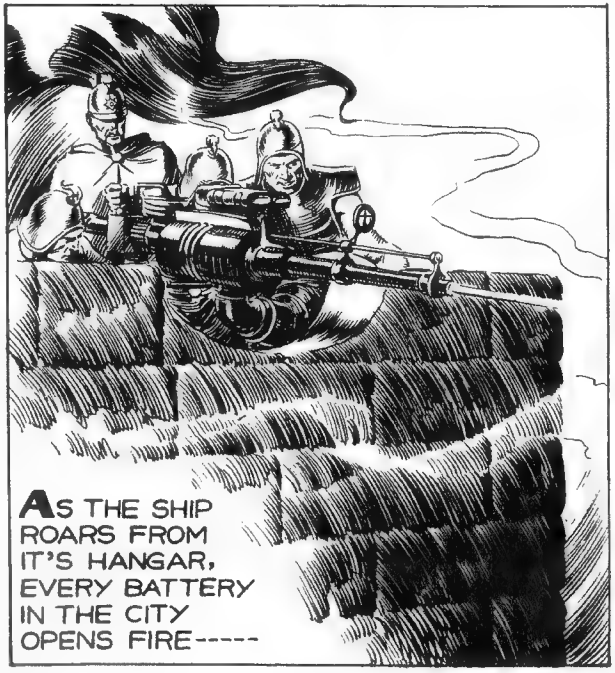
Style is a very simple matter, it is all rhythm.
—Virginia Wolfe (Letter 9/8/28)

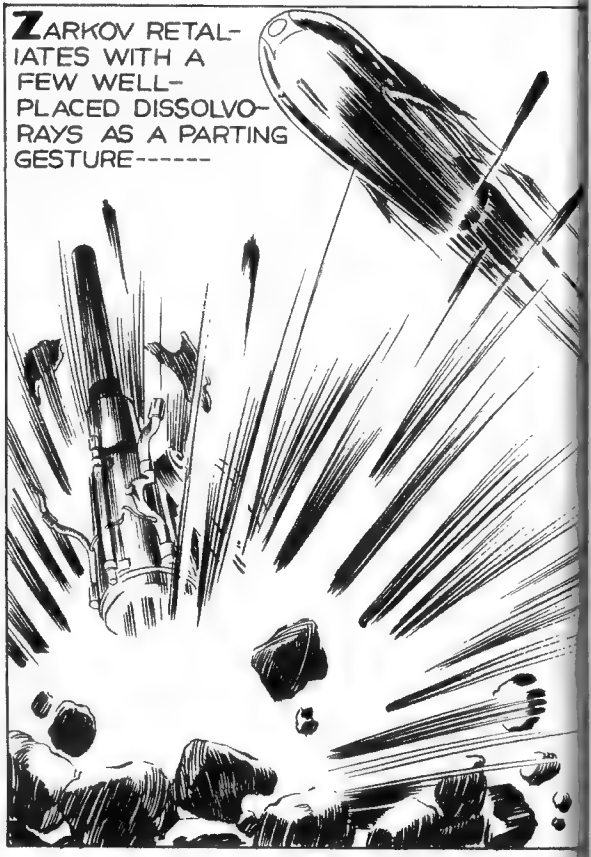
Once the rhythm changes, the style will change. The source is either the interior landscape of the imagination, or the exterior model or photo reference. The result will be different. Compare the portrait of Ming in 3/15/36 with his image in subsequent years. That portrait in 3/15 will always be my favorite image of Ming because it presents the very essence of his nature. That image could not come from a photo reference; it comes directly from Raymond's soul. Masterful! Each line has an almost satanic vigor; his eyes are cold, hard, unfeeling—a reptile in human shape. 1935-1936 is filled with many such lyrical and inspired bursts.

AS FLASH AND DALE, AT THE HEAD OF THEIR ARMY, PASS INTO THE FIRST GREAT CAVE A GROUP OF SCATTERED ROCKS SLOWLY COMES TO LIFE---- LIZARD-MEN--POISONOUS AND HORRIBLE!
"THE LAND OF
NEXT WEEK: THE LIZARD-MEN!"
3-17

LEAD ME TO THE BACK DOOR, QUICK! AND NO TREACHERY, OR ELSE--!
DON'T KILL ME-- I'LL DO ANY-THING YOU SAY!
DON'T HURT HIM--
HOTLY PURSUED BY MING'S GUARDS, FLASH LEADS DALE AND ZARKOV INTO A PRIVATE HOME--------

THE THREE FUGITIVES ESCAPE INTO AN ALLEY-------
HURRY! THERE'S THE PLACE I HID OUR ROCKET SHIP


AS THE SHIP ROARS FROM IT'S HANGAR, EVERY BATTERY IN THE CITY OPENS FIRE-----


ZARKOV RETAL-IATES WITH A FEW WELL-PLACED DISSOLVO-RAYS AS A PARTING GESTURE------

THEY ENTER A HANGAR, FORMERLY THE PROPERTY OF PRINCE BARIN, WHICH HOUSES ZARKOV'S BLACK ROCKET SHIP--ZARKOV PRESSES A BUTTON-- THE HUGE DOORS SLIDE OPEN-----
MING'S AIR FLEET QUICKLY FOLLOWS AS ZARKOV HEADS INTO THE STRANGE MANY-HUED FOGS-------
4-5
NEXT WEEK:
THE SEA OF MYSTERY!

Consider the wonderful page from 4/5/36, which represents the last page of the memorable "War with Ming" sequence and the first page of the "Water World" sequence. The top three panels are routinely excellent with great figure composition and good movement. The bottom tier is exceptional. The scene opens with Ming directing a ray-gun squad. The pen work is sublime. Raymond adds a few lightly suggested wisps of smoke to provide a three-dimensional effect. This is continued in the second panel with its wildly energetic explosion and ultra-sleek speeding rocket ship. A better rocket ship cannot be found in any Sunday page. All this wonderfully dramatic action terminates in the last panel with a scene that is, by any standard, inspired. The landscape, with its shimmering lines of fog, delicately crosshatched rocket ships, and heavy ocean movements, is filled with magic, mystery, and ominous portent. The smoothness of Raymond's pen work must be seen in the original. Stunning, absolutely stunning. It is ennobling to be able to participate in a truly timeless epic.

Raymond in History

Along with *Prince Valiant*, *Flash Gordon* is one of the two great adventure strips. Its position is assured and unquestioned. Raymond's ongoing standard of excellence in this adventure genre is matched only by Hal Foster. Again, my reason for writing this essay is not to denigrate any portion of Raymond's output, but to draw attention to a period of art that is truly special. It is trivially true to say that the typical strip artist lives, at best, a treadmill existence. He must constantly produce and often this insatiable daily demand on his powers produces mediocrity. Mediocrity, and less, abounds. Realistically, this is all that a mass medium should expect from its laborers. There is no time for pause, for rumination, for nurturing genuine creative ideas and innovative approaches. The mass market demands product, only that.

Raymond is one of those amazing exceptions. His work, the prodigious demands of drawing three strips, remained at a level of excellence attained by few. Within this, the sustained brilliance of the 1935-1936 period is unparalleled. The "War with Ming" pages represent the finest moment in the history of the medium. It also represents one of the all-time high points of American art of any kind. He obviously labored with love; his care and industriousness rewarded him with page after page of compelling designs and unrivaled figure compositions. The other qualities of nobility, heroism, truth, beauty and honor literally explode from his precisely modulated lines. These unique lines are etched not only in the Sunday pages, but etched into eternity; they will always breathe a constant freshness. Time will only confirm and enhance their value. The art is timeless; the romantic spirit it conveys is equally timeless. Raymond caressed our eyes with pure enchantment; he was working in a special state of grace during this time, never seen before or since in the strip medium. It is a gift rarely given. It is engaging and romantic, uplifting and poetic; it is one heart's gentle wonder speaking to another.

Inspiration Central

RON FRENZ—Freeing the Child Within

by Bill Baker

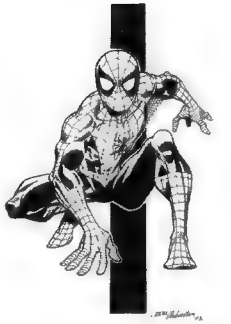
Editor's note: For just about two decades now Ron Frenz has supplied a series of Marvel Comics titles with his sturdy pencils and rock solid storytelling. And while he's quite capable of believably portraying a cosmic powered clash of titans with all of the necessary bravado and sheer stunning force, he's also more than able to handily convey the subtlest shades of emotional nuance in those same characters, even in the midst of all-out battle. Recently, Frenz had the time of his life delineating the adventures of Mr. Right, *a brand new creator-owned book from Image that he co-created with his long-time partner in crime, former Marvel Editor-in-Chief Tom DeFalco. Though not a top seller, the title was somehow simultaneously fresh, exciting and contemporary, while still serving as a heartfelt and living tribute to all of the good things they both love in comics. The affable, and very funny Frenz was kind enough to take a few moments from his busy sketching schedule at the 2001 Pittsburgh Comic Con to outline how the tastes cemented during his childhood have steadily shaped his own work, both past and present.*

Comic Book Marketplace: Who were some of the people who influenced your approach to creating comic book art?

Ron Frenz: I have no influences. I was created out of whole cloth. I am a genius in and of myself, and never recognize other people's influence on my work. [General laughter]

Inks by Joe Sinnott

Having said that, the stuff I grew up on. I think anybody's inspirations, anybody's influences, are the things that they grew up on as a kid. And for me, it was John Romita *Spider-Man*, John Romita *Daredevil*. John Buscema, Sal Buscema. Some of Steve Ditko's *Spider-Man*, of course; once you discover that, that's amazing. Jack Kirby is an obvious influence on my work.



Inks by Joe Rubenstein

CBM: What about Gene Colan's work?

Frenz: Gene Colan was terrific. He was such an illustrator's illustrator, though; I tend to think that I'm more the cartoony side. I'm more on the, not straight illustration, but the more stylized, cartoony stuff. More Sal Buscema-Jack Kirby type of guys. But there are lots of people I admire, absolutely.

CBM: What about their work excited you, and how does that show up in your own work?

Frenz: Well, the word you just used is the answer to that question; anything that grabs you and excites you. That pulls you in. I tend to like stuff that has a life to it and usually—I don't want to talk in broad strokes—usually that's the stuff that is a little more graphic, and a little more cartoony. There can be beautiful illustration done in comics. A lot of guys do wonderful illustration. But it doesn't move. It doesn't tell the story, it doesn't help move the story along. It tends to be a little static, when you're talking about comics storytelling.

So guys like Jack Kirby I feel perfected the language of telling a story. So when it comes to sitting down and breaking down a story, and seeing it done dramatically, I think almost everybody in the industry these days is influenced on some level by Jack Kirby, because he kind of created the modern language [of comics storytelling]. You know, there are people who kind of ignore what Jack did and just try to do movies in comic books, but they have varying degrees of success with that, because movies work better as movies. I think between Will Eisner and Jack Kirby, I think they pretty much perfected what works as the language of comics, and what works best at telling a comic book story.

So, the Silver Age guys are the guys that I really grew up on and love. I'm a fan of a lot of different people now. I think Mike Mignola is a consummate storyteller. Alex Toth was a big inspiration for me, even through the original Hanna Barbera cartoons like *Space Ghost* and stuff, but

[continued on page 80]

THE Greatest COMIC BOOK ever!

well...for this month at least

by Mark Squirek

A couple of Sundays ago, my friend Martina called and asked if I wanted to go to a local Retail Warehouse that was offering free visits to non-members. Every city has at least one of these now. You pay an annual fee and you can shop at their monstrous, warehouse-sized store. Since everything is sold in bulk quantities, the prices are lower. If you have never been in one of these places, the shear abundance of the selection can absolutely floor you.

Martina has been in America since she was 15. She came over on a student exchange program from Sweden and has been in America off and on for over 20 years. Now, considering this is a woman who was a model in Paris at 15, has seen countless sunsets all over the world and can hold her own with both European Royalty and the guy who lives in the efficiency apartment next to the laundry room in the basement of her building, it takes lot to leave her speechless.

When we walked into the Sales Club and were confronted by a 20-foot pile of automobile tires, 30 feet long, her jaw dropped. For the first half hour of our visit, she was in total, mind-numbing awe at the sight of everything in front of her.

I understood perfectly how she felt, because I had the exact same reaction when I saw my first 80-Page Giant from DC. In the run of 80-Page Giants, it was numbered G-24 and it featured Batman [and is, in fact, *Batman* #182]. It was so *much* Batman that it was overwhelming.

There never has been, nor will there ever be, a greater comic book value than the DC 80-Page Giants. With their titles printed on the square bound spines, the Giants are the spiritual predecessors to the modern trade paperbacks.

Giant G-24 stands out among most of the 80-Page run because it is graced with DC's mid-sixties concession to modernity, Go-Go Checks. Designed to make DC's books stand out on the spinner racks, Go-Go Checks did their job admirably, because I clearly remember making the conscious decision to go right past any book that did not feature them across the top.

Promising six "BIG fantastic BIZARRE adventures," the book delivered on all levels. Dividing the cover into quarters, four of the stories were highlighted. The most promising story for me has what is still my all time favorite drawing of the Dark Knight. With a banner to left of the panel promising "The Joker Batman," a grinning, joyous Batman is running, hands overhead, guffawing like, well, The Joker.

Something about the crazed look on the Caped Crusader still cracks me up. It seems that for one brief moment, he has forgotten all the pain and work that has made him who he is.

[continued on page 80]

Spider-Man Busted!

...and Statued full figure

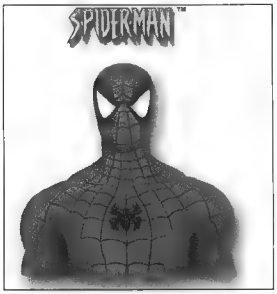
Collectable Character Statues

by Mike Wilbur

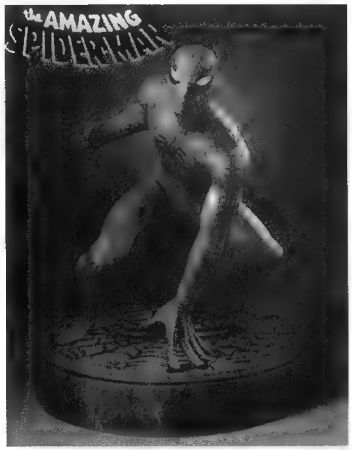
"It was the best of times; it was the worst of times..." **Charles Dickens'** immortal opening line from *A Tale of Two Cities* could easily have been penned to express the dilemma currently facing **Spider-Man** collectors following the phenomenal box-office success of their web-slinging hero.

Thanks to the strong leap in public awareness of Marvel Comics' flagship character, all things Spider-Man are in high demand. And this demand is not limited to just movie-merchandising toys and products. Even high-end Spidey collectibles are feeling the heat. This is great for those with product to sell, but it puts an added financial burden on buyers of high-end, limited edition pieces.

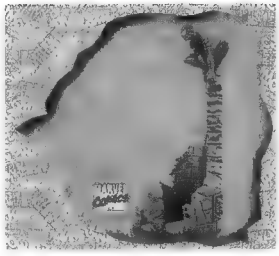
Spider-Man; Attakus 1997



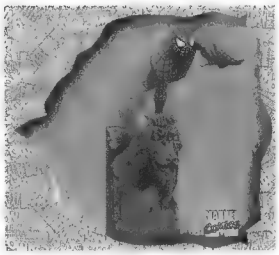
Spider-Man Bust; Attakus. Also offered in black costume version



Bronze; First Spider-Man piece produced by Bowen in 1998



Spider-Man: Spirits of the Earth; Attakus. Based on Charles Vess' cover art to the 1990 hardcover graphic novel



Gargoyle; Attakus. Also offered in black costume version

Mini-Bust; Bowen 2000

While manufacturers of mass-market toys and action figures can just gear up and produce more supply to fill the increased demand, a *limited* edition is (by obvious definition) a *limited* edition. More demand? Oh well; same supply. So, instead of increased quantities, we get sharply increased demand and prices.

There has been a sizeable quantity and diversity of Spider-Man statues and busts produced over the last ten years by a number of studios, with a lot more on the way. Companies such as **Bowen Designs**, **Diamond Select**, **Dynamic Forces**, **Factory X**, **Legends in 3 Dimensions** and **Attakus** have all produced statues and busts of Spider-Man and related characters, or have pending items in the pipeline.

The first of the Spider-Man sculptures arrived in the early '90s from a French company called **Attakus** as part of a full-line of Marvel character statues and busts. On the whole, the Attakus busts were pretty lame and badly

rendered, but some of the statues, such as the **Spider-Man: Spirits of the Earth**, were pretty well done. Also appearing were pieces featuring Spidey vaulting over a stone gargoyle (in both traditional and black costume versions), crouched on the cornice of a building and dangling upside-down from his web peering through a window. These better pieces are hard to find on the secondary market and usually bring big money when they do turn up.

Traditional Costume; Bowen 2001

Next in the arena of Spider-Man statues was **Legends in 3-Dimensions**, who produced a variety of licensed pieces in the mid-'90s. This included hefty 1/4 scale busts of Spider-Man and his arch-nemesis the **Green Goblin**. Legends in 3 Dimensions is primarily known for their statues and busts of characters from the **Star Trek**, **Star Wars**, **Babylon 5**, **Battlestar: Galactica**, **X-Files** and **Terminator** franchises.

Alter-Ego Mini-Bust; Bowen 2000; Wizard Magazine exclusive

Then, in 1998, **Bowen Designs** acquired the Marvel license for a four-year term. Actually, three separate four-year licenses with three staggered start and expiration dates. The first was for full-size statues, the second for mini-busts, and the third for mini-statues.

Bowen produced, during his tenure, a 1:6 scale bronze Spider-Man statue, four full-size (1:8 scale) resin statues (three of Spidey and one of arch-nemesis the Green Goblin), ten mini-busts (four of Spidey and six of various Spider-foes), and two Spider-Man mini-statues.

Life-Size Bust; Dynamic Forces 2002

Black Costume Variant; Bowen 2001

The first full-size statue featured the webslinger crouching atop the corner of a battle-damaged building. Several months later, the companion piece was released featuring the cause of the devastation, the Green Goblin, soaring gleefully atop his smoke-spewing glider. These pieces were followed later in the year by two **"Standing Spider-Man"** statues. Released in consecutive months, both of these items had the same basic figure sculpt and differed only in the costume color and detail. The earlier release wore the traditional red-and-blue costume, and the later sported the black costume introduced in *Amazing Spider-Man* #252 in May 1984. In mid-2002, mini-statue versions of these latter two pieces were released.

Spider-Man; Bowen 2001; forms battle scene with companion Green Goblin statue

The year 2001 saw the appearance of five Spider-family mini-busts: Spider-Man, the Green Goblin, **Doctor Octopus**, **The Rhino** and the **Wizard** magazine exclusive **Alter-Ego** mini-bust. This last piece is a variant version of a Peter Parker pseudo-bronze mini-bust included with the earlier bronze statue. This variant

Ultimate Spider-Man; Diamond Select 2002

[cont. on page 67]

GEOFF JOHNS

Avengers/JSA?

(Not yet, but they've got a writer in common!)

New & Noteworthy

by J.C. Vaughn
Executive Editor

Geoff Johns is a writer/producer living in Los Angeles, California. It seems it was just a few months ago that he took over Flash *from writer Mark Waid, but in fact it was* Flash *#164½ more than two years ago. In the intervening time, Johns has become one of the most sought-after writers in the business. With* Flash, JSA, *and* Hawkman *from DC on his regular schedule, he recently added Marvel's* The Avengers *to his duties.*

Comic Book Marketplace: In the minds of many comics fans, you've gone rather quickly from "the guy who took over *Flash* from Mark Waid" to a very high profile creator. Reality is rarely that simple. What was it like breaking in, and how does that compare to now?

Geoff Johns: It was hard. I think it is for anyone in this business. There are a lot of people that have a passion for this industry. Now, it can still be difficult—but in different ways. Mostly behind the scenes stuff. But for the most part, I love my job. I work with some terrific people and I'm having a lot of fun.

CBM: The Justice Society is the original super group. Is there any added pressure that comes with writing *JSA*?

Johns: Actually, the pressure on this book is the least I think—mostly because there hasn't been a *JSA* series that has gotten attention in a while. I already respect the history of this team, so there's no fear in totally screwing it up.

CBM: Hawkman is a popular character with so many different incarnations that even a die-hard enthusiast would be confused. What's your approach to this, and how would you recommend the new series to a reader who might be somewhat jaded by the sheer volume of the seeming contradictions?

Johns: Simply pick up *Hawkman* #1 or #5. It's extremely reader friendly. There's a little origin box that should tell you what you need to know.

CBM: You've got a rapidly increasing resume for DC, but now you're also adding a fair amount of work at Marvel, particularly with *The Avengers*. What attracts you to that title, and in what ways is it different than writing *JSA*?

Johns: *The Avengers* is very different than the *JSA*—just by dealing with the different themes of the book. *JSA* is legacy, to me *Avengers* is about trust. The way people trust the Avengers, and the trust issues between themselves. *The Avengers* characters are some of the most iconic and human heroes in print. To work with so many major characters in one title is a trip and a half.

CBM: Is there a typical Geoff Johns workday? Do you have a regular work area or can you write anywhere? What time of day do you prefer to write?

Johns: I have an office where I work from about 9 am to 7 pm—sometimes weeknights and weekends if needed, but I try not to. I find I usually can write best right in the morning (when the phone doesn't ring) and in the afternoon.

CBM: Can you work with a lot of distractions or do you need quiet and some private space to write?

Johns: I like music most of the time, just as long as the noise isn't overwhelming I'm good to go.

CBM: What's the first comic you remember reading? What were the circumstances?

Johns: The first one I remember buying was *Batman and the Outsiders* #13. It was a stand-alone story and for some reason it seemed really cool to me—the Outsiders making Batman relive his origin. I was on a camping trip. I think I was like 11. I also used to read my uncle's old Silver Age comics in my Grandma's attic. *Flash*, *Batman*, *Fantastic Four*, *Superman*. All the checkerboard stuff.

CBM: What do you enjoy reading at the moment (comics, books, scripts, etc.)?

Johns: All of the above. My favorite comic book at the moment is *The Ultimates*.

CBM: On your website you mention your work on Marvel's *Bloodstone* TV project. What's going on with that? What other film or TV work do you have going on at the moment?

Johns: The script is being written. Other projects are in different stages of development.

CBM: Do you think your film background helps you in comics? If so, how?

Johns: Definitely. I spent years developing scripts and pilots before breaking in—and my story sense and pacing comes from that experience.

Geoff Johns' website is ***www.GeoffJohns.com*** *and he invites* CBM *readers to stop by.*

[continued from page 65]

depicts Peter in classic **Steve Ditko** manner, with his face and head bilaterally split into half-Peter and half-Spidey.

In 2002, we saw villains **Kraven the Hunter** and **Mysterio**, plus a triple-pack set of busts including red-costume Spider-Man, black-costume Spider-Man, and alien nemesis **Venom**.

Since Bowen's mini-bust and mini-statue licenses have not yet ended at the time of this writing, there could be more added to these counts.

Currently filling the void created by Bowen's exit are three contenders for the crown.

First out of the gate was **Diamond Select**, with their **Ultimate Spider-Man** bust, released in both a direct-market and an exclusive-outlet mass-market variant version. Also issued in dual versions was the **Ultimate Green Goblin** bust. Following these releases were several busts of classic Spider-Man villains, including **The Sandman**, **Kraven the Hunter**, **The Lizard** and **The Kingpin** (who, since his creation in *Amazing Spider-Man* #50 in July 1967, and several years as a major thorn in the web-slinger's side, migrated over to become prime adversary of Marvel's **Daredevil**. Kingpin will make his big-screen debut in the 2/14/03 release of the *Daredevil* movie).

Dynamic Forces has produced an impressive life-size bust of the web-slinger, as well as two pairs of busts depicting Spider-Man and the Green Goblin as they appeared in the pivotal storyline in *Amazing Spider-Man* #39 and 40. The primary pair shows the adversaries in costume; the variant head-sculpts show them unmasked. DFE also has released alternate-future versions of characters from the Spider-mythos as part of the **Alex Ross' Earth X** line. Also designed by Alex Ross, and inspired by the art of Spider-Legend **John Romita Sr.**, the life-size bust is tentatively scheduled for a summer '02 release, but the prototype has been making the rounds at this year's conventions on display at the Dynamic Forces booth.

Factory X, known primarily for their incredibly detailed line of full-scale character and movie prop reproductions, is producing statues and busts based on the movie versions of Spider-Man and the Green Goblin. These items, one bust and one statue each for Spidey and the Goblin, were solicited in July '02 for a targeted September release.

Add to all these higher-ticket items the veritable flood of action figures, toys, bobble-head figures, lunch boxes, etc., produced in the wake of the movie and the resurgent popularity of the comic books, and Spider-fans are on a collision course with budgetary disaster of epic proportions!

Comics2Film Digest

by Rob Worley

IN PRODUCTION

Here's the latest on the comic book movies that are actually in production:

Principal photography on 20th Century Fox and Marvel's *Daredevil* wrapped in July. The movie is set to be released February 14, 2003.

Principal photography on Universal Studios and Marvel's *Hulk* was continuing at the time of this writing, with filming due to wrap late in July or early August. Look for The Hulk in theaters June 20, 2003.

Cameras started rolling on 20th Century Fox and Marvel's *X-Men 2* in Vancouver in late June. Much of the original cast is returning including Bruce Davison, who played the ill-fated Senator Kelly. Alan Cummings is on board to play Nightcrawler and Katie Stuart has the part of Kitty Pryde. Brian Cox (*The Bourne Identity*) will play the villainous Stryker while Kelly Hu (*The Scorpion King*) is his evil henchwoman Lady Deathstryke. Bit players: Daniel Cudmore has been cast as Colossus. Rumor has it that Kea Wong has been cast as Jubilee and Shauna Kain will be playing Siryn.

Production began in early July on 20th Century Fox's *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen* after delays due to illness by star Sean Connery. Connery plays Alexander Quatermain in the adaptation of Alan Moore's comic. Other cast members include Peta Wilson as Mina Harker, Shane West as Tom Sawyer, Jason Flemyng as Dr. Jekyll, Stuart Townsend as Dorian Gray, Tony Curran as the Invisible Man and Jason Isaacs

(clockwise from top left) Ashley Scott as The Huntress in **Birds of Prey**, the cast of **Birds of Prey**, Dina Meyer as Batgirl in **Birds of Prey**, Rachel Skarsten as Dinah Lance in **Birds of Prey**, Jennifer Garner as Elektra in **Daredevil**.

as Campion Bond. *Blade* director Stephen Norrington is directing from a script by comic writer James Robinson (*Starman*).

The WB network has committed to a season of DC Comics' *Birds of Prey*. Dina Meyer (*Bats*) plays Oracle, Rachel Skarsten is Dinah Lance and Ashley Scott (*A.I.*) plays The Huntress. Actress Sherilyn Fenn, who played Dr. Harleen Quinn (a.k.a. Harley Quinn) in the pilot, has dropped out of the show. She'll be replaced by Mia Sara (*Ferris Bueller's Day Off*) who will reshoot those scenes in the pilot episode.

Pre-production on the *Hellboy* movie began in June. Director/screenwriter Guillermo Del Toro, creator/producer Mike Mignola, concept artist Wayne Barlowe and a team of artists opened the production office and began work creating creatures and castles for the film. Cameras are set to roll early next year in Prague.

BATMAN VS SUPERMAN

The big story this summer is that Warner Bros. is now going full-steam ahead with *Batman Vs. Superman*. Wolfgang Petersen (*The Perfect Storm*) is set to direct and produce. Andrew Kevin Walker (*Seven*) wrote the script. The story has the two heroes as allies until a horrific crime-spree leads to a clash of ideologies.

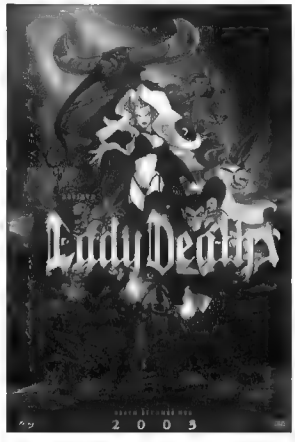
SHI

Mimi Polk Gitlin, through her Mandolin Entertainment, has optioned the comic book series *Shi* from creator Billy Tucci. Gitlin has recently completed the Mandolin Production *Trapped* with her partner Luis Mandoki directing, starring Kevin Bacon and Charlize Theron. "We see *Shi* as a major motion picture franchise that incorporates original action sequences with elements á la *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* into a contemporary New York detective thriller," says Gitlin. Tucci is enthused to be working with the producer. "She's one of the few people I've met out there who actually got the story. She produced *Thelma and Louise* so she's got a good grasp on female themes in action-type pictures," the comic creator said. Kevin Bernhardt (*Tears From Heaven*) is attached to write the script with Tucci.

(above) Colin Farrell as Bullseye, Michael Clark as Kingpin, Jon Favreau as Foggy Nelson; in Daredevil.

30 DAYS OF NIGHT

Senator International has optioned Steve Niles' new comic *30 Days of Night* for feature film development. The book, which tells the story of an Alaskan town under siege by vampires during the season where the sun doesn't rise for a month, was the subject of an intense bidding war and reportedly garnered a price in the $1 million range. Niles will write the script for the film. *Spider-Man* director Sam Raimi and partner Rob Tapert are producing. Raimi has said he will not direct it as he will be too busy with *Spider-Man 2*. Dark Horse Entertainment's Mike Richardson is an executive producer.



LADY DEATH

ADV Films provided fans with a first look at the animated *Lady Death* at this year's Comic-Con in San Diego. Full-color posters of the character were distributed featuring the first-ever images of the animated version of the character. T-Shirts were also available. The direct-to-video movie is due out on DVD in 2003.

G-MEN FROM HELL

The movie version of Mike Allred's *G-Men From Hell* is finally available to fans. The DVD and VHS versions of the movie went on sale in late July. Fans who want the full-Allred experience can ask their comic

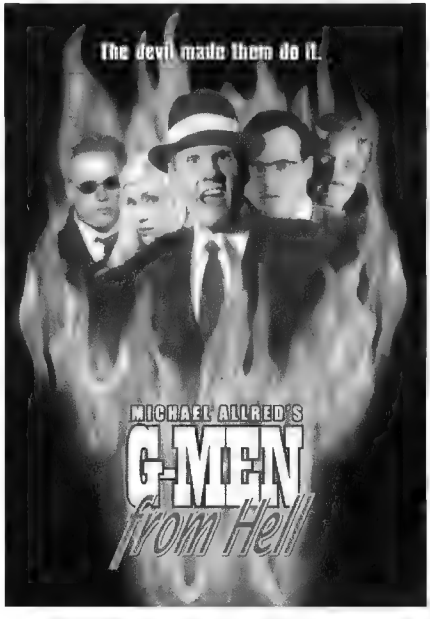
retailers for a special version that sports new Allred artwork on the cover. The disc features the hilarious feature-length film and tons of bonuses including a commentary track by Allred and the comic-creator's full-length indie movie *Astroesque*.

SOME TROUBLE OF A SErrIOUS NATURE

Comic creator-turned-filmmaker Billy Tucci told "Comics2Film" that his film *Some Trouble of a SeRRious Nature* has been awarded "Best Short Film (Video)" honors at this year's Long Island International Film Expo. The movie was the recipient of a finishing grant from the Long Island Film/TV Foundation. Tucci also screened the movie for comic fans at this summer's Comic-Con International in San Diego.

COMIC MOVIES ARE #1

Four major comic book movies were released this year and all of them saw at least some time as the #1 movie at the box office. *Blade 2* debuted at the top spot and *Men In Black 2* held that position for its first two weeks. *Spider-Man*, of course, spent plenty of time at the top of the chart and shattered all kinds of records. Most interesting, perhaps, was *Road To Perdition*, which debuted at #2 while opening on a relatively small number of screens. The comic-based gangster movie then made a rare upward move to the top spot in its second week of release!



G-Men From Hell: (above) Allred DVD art, (below)standard DVD art.

SHORT TAKES

• Up and coming screenwriter Hans Rodionoff has been hired to pen a draft of Marvel's *Werewolf by Night*. He also started pitching his take on Matt Wagner's *Grendel* earlier this year. That one is to be produced by Arsenal Entertainment.

• George Miller (*Mad Max*, *Babe: Pig in the City*) has been named as a possible candidate for directing duties on the *Wonder Woman* feature film. Becky Johnston is writing a new draft of the script.

• Comic scribe Len Wein is writing the script for a *Swamp Thing* movie for Joel Silver and Warner Bros. Wein co-created the DC Comics character.

• Jim Carrey and Garry Shandling have signed on to provide the voices for the two main characters in the CGI-animated comic-strip adaptation *Over The Hedge*.

• Filmmaker Robert Rodriguez has committed to making *Spy Kids 3* before the stars are too old to be called "kids." This is bad news for *Madman* fans. Rodriguez is set to write, produce and direct the movie version of Mike Allred's character. Allred assured C2F that the filmmaker is still very much interested in doing the movie.

• Linda Woolverton (*Beauty and the Beast*) is on board to write the script for Top Cow's *Fathom*. James Cameron is producing.

• The *Spider-Man* DVD is due out November 1. There'll be two, two-disc DVD versions: one widescreen, one full-screen that'll be full of extras. There will also be a collector's edition that has special packaging. A VHS edition will also be available.

• Brian Pulido and Joshua Dysart are writing a script for a feature film version of *Evil Ernie*.

• Fred Willard (*Best In Show*) is recording voice work for an animated short pilot of the popular campus strip *Captain RibMan*.

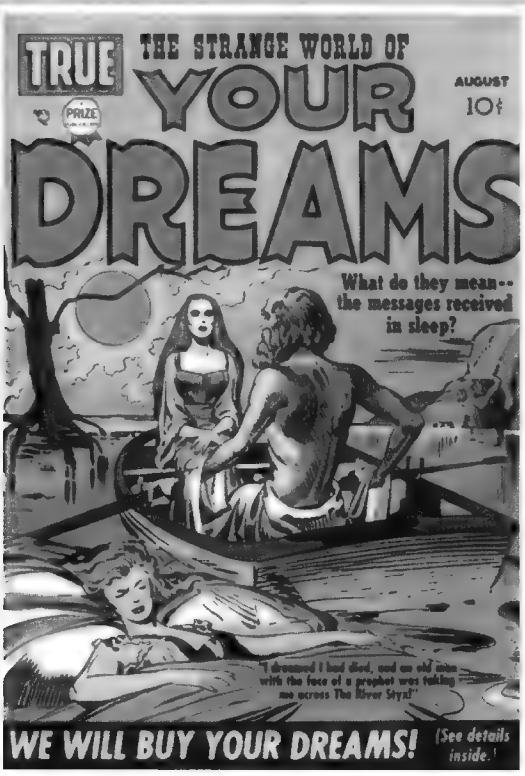
• Brian Wood announced that his comic *Couscous Express* has been optioned for film.

• MTV has delayed the debut of the *Spider-Man* animated show until early 2003.

The Michael Naiman Report
Dreams & Plastic

Making the rounds on a Saturday afternoon to the local comic hangout has been a tradition for many years now. As we go about our busy lives, some of us have found that there's been an unavoidable but slow and steady drifting from our comic roots taking place. This opportunity to "come home" is an anticipated time when we can reconnect and share our interests with our local comic buddies—many of whom we only see once a week at the comic store.

There's not much that stands in the way of getting together and talking comics. **Greg**, the patient owner, allows us to congregate ala "Cheers." And, yes, there is a cast of characters. **Rick**, one of our hardcore locals, showed up to "talk comics" even though he had surgery on his tongue and couldn't utter a word. He had to be there to absorb the scene. **Dave** had just flown in from Singapore 24 hours earlier and not even jetlag would prevent him from attending! **Alex** had just pulled an all-nighter putting together his latest CD-ROM of Good Girl comics that he'd be selling at the ComicCon International: San Diego. The manufacturer's deadline was Saturday, but Alex was there, although maybe not bright-eyed and bushytailed. He wasn't going to miss this confab. **Charlie**, the expectant father, had his beeper turned up full blast, just in case the Prego/Delivery alert was sounded. **Jennifer** and **Beth** proudly show the flag for the many female customers who also drop by to purchase their weekly books. These are truly the hardcore and devoted.



As we have come to expect, the conversation turns to the arcane and obscure. This weekend was no different. With this particular group, The King Jack Kirby is eventually a topic of discussion. This Kirby conversation turned to the four-issue run of **The Strange World of Your Dreams**, produced by Prize Publications starting in August of 1952. The covers are sublime Simon and Kirby—all that one would expect. Each issue asked the reader to "send us your dreams" and they would be analyzed by your host, Richard Temple.

Just so no one would take this comic too seriously (it is a comic book, right?) there was a disclaimer printed at the beginning of each issue that is worth repeating for its entertainment value.

"The advice which Mr. Temple offers in this story is intended only for the person involved and applies to that individual's situation—a similar dream could have a completely different interpretation for someone else."

Like someone would sue the publishers for messing with their minds? Check out this oft overlooked series; you will not regret it. But, fugetaboutit in anything over a VF condition!

Thanks to **Tracy Heft** for the following info, which was previously published in a longer format.

While attempts to **protect paper collectibles** from the ravages of improper handling have existed almost as long as the objects themselves, only in the last three decades have **collectible-specific plastic products** been produced. Made from a wide variety of plastic materials chosen for a number of reasons, all were designed to afford protection to the paper item as it was stored, handled and/or transported. Concern for long-term storage was minimal, as were concerns over purity of the plastic material itself. In the hobby of comic collecting, several evolutions have occurred both in design and material composition. These evolutions have primarily centered around extending the life of the comic book, however, questions still remain about the

suitability of the plastics being used to protect and preserve collections. Thus, the American Association of Comicbook Collectors contracted with J. Mason Associates in January 2001, to undertake the **analysis** of a representative sample of storage and display containers commonly used within the comic-collecting hobby.

The AACC submitted nine (9) material samples for testing using Fourier-Transform Infrared (FTIR) spectroscopy. This method of testing produces a unique spectrum, which identifies the constituent materials within the product.

The following tables reveal the nine samples submitted for testing:

Sample #	Commercial Name	Primary Compound	Common Name of Compound
1	Mylite	Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET)	Mylar
2	Mylar Envelope	Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET)	Mylar
3	Ultra-Pro Envelope	Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET)[1]	PET
4	Polypropylene Env.	Polypropylene	Polypropylene
5	CGC Interior Holder	Acrylonitrile Butadiene Methyl Acrylate	Copolymer Barex
6	CGC Exterior Holder	Styrene Acrylonitrile Copolymer	SAN
7	Showcase Sealer	Polymethyl Methacrylate	Plexiglass
8	Fortress Exterior Case	Polystyrene	Polystyrene
9	Fortress Interior Film	Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET)[2]	PETG

[1]Sample 3 is PET but contains different additives.
[2]Sample 9 is a modified form of PET

Depending on the requirements of the end user, a certain plastic may be chosen over another. Which plastic film to use in the manufacturing process is determined by a number of reasons and can include overall strength/stiffness of the final product, stability over time, formability, permeability to gases and permeability to moisture. Every plastic film has **its strengths and its weaknesses** in each of these areas and no two are alike. Some are excellent moisture barriers but poor gas barriers. Others are excellent gas barriers but poor moisture barriers. Generally, the better the gas barrier, the poorer the moisture barrier.

Within the Library of Congress and The National Archives and Records Administration, polyethylene, polypropylene and PET are used almost exclusively in the housing of archival records. The choice to use one material over another is made with regard to the item to be housed and the amount of handling expected. As well, the conditions of the storage environment are given due consideration.

According to Specification Number 400-301-3/2/93, the Library of Congress requires that its polyethylene terephthalate films used in the preservation of paper and paper-based materials must be:

"...a clear, colorless, (biaxially oriented/stressed/drawn) poly(ethylene-terephthalate) film such as DuPont Mylar D, ICI Melinex 516 or equivalent."

and

"...clear and colorless polyester film must not contain any plasticizer, surface coatings, UV inhibitors, or absorbents and be guaranteed to be non-yellowing with natural aging. As received the film must not contain any coloring agents."

From the results of the FTIR tests, only samples 1, 2, 3 and 9 are composed of PET. Of these four samples, only 1 and 2 are pure PET without additives or modification of the molecular form.

In the case of plasticizers, further chemical reactions can occur within the plastic. As a result, **the compounds may eventually leech from the plastic film and come into contact with the item being protected.**

Furthermore, in the samples that were submitted for testing, every sample seems to contain an ultraviolet inhibitor, which would render each and every sample unsuitable for use by the Library of Congress.

All of the tested samples provide a degree of protection from improper handling and/or storage. This is in accordance with their design. However, since each plastic has differing degrees of gaseous and vapor protection, it quickly becomes apparent that certain plastics are more suited to specific situations than others.

When choosing a storage product, the collector must strive for a film that is pure in composition. For example, while polyethylene and polypropylene in their pure sheet form are quite stable, both polypropylene and polyethylene comic bags contain plasticizers in order to facilitate sealing of the bag at the edges.

As mentioned, **additives or plasticizers** can alter the effectiveness of the plastic film as a barrier to gas and vapor permeation. As well, the materials introduced into the storage environment should not contain harmful additives as the additives themselves can accelerate the degradation of the materials they were designed to protect.

Ultimately, the plastic materials used in the storage of archival items are only effective when the conditions for storage are within controlled and monitored accepted norms. If the environmental factors of heat, light and humidity are not controlled, it will not matter what system of storage is used—degradation of the material will continue to occur.

Prior testing of all polymeric materials reveals that as **temperature** increases, so does the rate of diffusion. The same is true for humidity content and even the quality of light can affect the plastics ability to block harmful gases and water vapor from coming into contact with the protected item. Since every storage area is unique and can vary from one geographical region to another, which holder to use should depend more on the situational conditions instead of the perceived effectiveness of individual products.

CBM MarketWatch

A report of market indicator sales (including % of Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide) by Michael Naiman

Adventure Comics
#283 VF- $120 Guide
#381 VF $45 80%

Amazing Fantasy
#12 VF- $157 54%
#14 VF- $250 79%
#15 VG- $2,200 92%

All American
#53 GD+ $75 84%
#62 VG+ $127 77%
#91 GD $87 87%

Amazing Spider-Man

#16 FN $120 98%
#40 VF $155 62%
#46 VF $65 74%
#50 FN $120 98%
#50 VF $228 72%
#50 FN+ $155 1.26X
#53 NM $68 62%
#62 VF $35 70%
#82 VF- $25 66%
#96 VF $60 78%
#100 VF- $150 1.07X
#108 VF $22 76%
#110 NM- $30 66%
#117 NM- $16 36%
#118 NM- $27 60%
#137 NM- $70 1.27X
#138 NM $41 1.86X
#144 NM $46 1.84X
#298 NM- $30 86%

Batman
#29 GD $110 73%
#33 VF- $394 53%
#41 FN $204 86%
#56 VG $158 1.03X
#93 VG- $ 60 60%
#189 FN $21 78%
#20 VG- $250 63%
#39 FR $55 Guide
#141 FN $46 73%
#204 VF- $15 63%
#204 NM- $35 Guide
#214 NM $43 1.43
#215 NM- $48 1.6X
#216 NM- $44 1.47X
#217 NM- $32 1.07X

Beany & Cecil
#FC 368 FN $47 60%

Blackhawk
#20 FN $150 82%

Bob Colt
#6 VG $36 Guide

Brave and Bold
#86 NM- $45 82%
#92 NM $36 1.13X
#102 NM $44 1.37X

Captain Marvel Adventures
#5 FN- $200 44%

Crusader Rabbit
#FC 735 VG $62 97%

Detective
#372 NM- $49 1.08X
#383 NM- $34 76%
#389 NM- $41 91%
#395 NM- $105 2.33X
#402 NM- $66 1.47X
#403 NM- $36 1.03X

Don Winslow of Navy
#40 FN $34 87%

Ellery Queen
#2 VG $70 88%

Famous Funnies
#27 FN $150 91%

Fantastic Four
#27 VF $100 85%
#28 VF $175 89%
#48 VF $415 63%

Fight
#1 GD $128 43%

Flash
#168 NM $73 91%

Green Lantern (GA)
#10 GD+ $250 1.34X

Green Lantern (SA)
#87 NM- $59 1.3X

Hit
#1 VG $515 43%

Horrific
#7 FN+ $154 2.33X
#10 FN $61 92%

House of Secrets
#92 VF- $189 49%

Jon Juan
#1 VG+ $75 64%

Journey Into Unknown Worlds
#7 FN- $225 84%

Jungle
#110 VF- $71 72%

Justice League of America
#8 VF+ $180 92%

Little Lulu
#30 FN $49 1.17X

Marvel Tales (Atlas)
#106 VG $64 61%

Mary Marvel
#1 VG $430 1.13X

Menace
#10 GD $28 97%

Military
#18 VG+ $120 82%
#35 VG $64 58%

Mister Miracle
#1 VF $33

March of Comics
#20 VF $2,142 83%

Modern
#49 VG+ $60 75%

Police
#46 VG+ $61 76%

Sensation
#10 VG+ $213 1.01X
#55 FN $100 83%
#56 VF- $138 59%
#94 FN $203 1.43X

Showcase
#22 VF $1,275 43%
#22 GD+ $213 65%
#23 GD+ $83 70%

Space Adventures
#5 VF- $61 53%

Space Squadron
#5 VF $275 98%

Space War
#24 VF- $13 42%

Spectacular Spider-Man Mag
#1 NM- $70 64%

Spy Smasher
#1 FN $1,000 95%

Strange Stories of Suspense
#8 VF- $47 33%

Strange Tales
#10 VG $63 53%

Sub-Mariner
#1 FN $24 50%

Superman
#11 VG+ $450 1.05X
#200 NM- $55 85%

Suspense
#2 GD $275 93%

Thing
#1 VG+ $102 62%

3D EC Classics
#1 VG+ $71 41%

Uncle Scrooge
#10 VG $32 1.07X
#18 VG $15 55%

Vampirella
#86 NM $18 82%
#88 NM $18 82%
#89 NM $18 82%
#101 NM $35 77%
#102 NM $35 77%
#90 NM $18 75%
#100 NM $70 88%

Vault of Horror
#16 GD $33 61%
#17 VG $42 50%
#23 VF- $128 54%
#24 VG+ $41 60%

WDC&S
#51 VG+ $38 76%

Web of Mystery
#1 FN $128 82%

Weird
#6 GD $50 53%

Wonder Woman
#17 VG $178 89%
#105 GD+ $181 2.10X
#192 NM $61 2.18X
#193 NM- $21 75%
#197 NM $61 1.74X
#198 NM- $34 97%
#203 NM- $33 2.06X
#196 NM- $103 2.92X

Wonder World
#17 GD $68 83%

World of Fantasy
#16 VF- $76 58%
#19 VF- $56 43%

World's Finest
#13 VF- $300 35%
#14 FN $214 52%
#15 FN $202 50%
#27 VF+ $355 68%
#30 VG+ $97 58%
#35 VG+ $87 58%
#67 VG $105 95%

X-Men
#8 FN+ $90 96%
#9 VF $145 62%
#9 VF- $158 68%
#10 VF $180 72%
#13 FN+ $81 96%
#38 VF+ $55 75%
#94 VF- $450 94%

MARKET REPORTS

Chris Foss

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The first **WizardWorld** show in Philadelphia had strength, especially considering it was Mothers Day on Sunday. I was not originally planning to set up there, but customers contacted me from the New York, Baltimore and Washington DC areas in the weeks before the show to see if I was coming and that convinced me to go. It is the perfect location for a show in the Northeast to draw from so many large metro areas and still be accessible by public transportation or car. The date was good for the area, but a little tight for those who do most national shows such as Motor City, which was a week later, and many dealers were coming off a Pittsburgh and WonderCon sprint recently. I had to skip Detroit.

The strength I mentioned for me in sales came predominantly from **existing clients** from the aforementioned **nearby cities**. They were ready to buy since there had not been a major event in several months in the region. Having a nice selection of fresh product was the key to translating more sales in Philly for me. **Silver Age** was the most asked for genre, with Spider-Man leading the way. Unfortunately for me, that is the one thing I did not have in abundance. A Daredevil #1 CGC 9.0 sold for $3200.

Other **notable sales** included: Our Army at War #83 in VF for $1800; seven or so high grade later issues for around $500; Captain America #100 in FN/VF for $100; X-Men #68 NM for $50, #9 in FN for $110; Green Lantern #2 FN $125; Superman #199 FN/VF for $75; and several batches of lower grade pre-100 Spideys totaling about $500.

I saw more action on the **Golden Age** front as I had more material specific customers were looking for. Captain America #46 CGC 7.0 went for $3600; Mystic #7 GD $280; Batman #42 VF- $575; Jackpot #4 FN (restored) $425; Mystery Men #13 VG- $100, #30 VG $90; Whiz #19 VG $200; Four Favorites #7 FN/VF $110.

A large batch of Jerry Lewis and Bob Hope in grade left the building too. **Pre-code** Atlas and horror fifties horror comics in general were stronger than they have been in a while. Lots of trading going on—I think I did around $10,000 in trade deals alone. Timely and DC Batman and Superman titles still sell the fastest, but there is plenty of action to be had with the more esoteric companies like EC, Fiction House and Atlas. All in all I think the summer is looking to be a good one.

Greg White

Comics and Collectibles
17 West Monument Avenue
Kissimmee, FL 34741
407-870-0400

Welcome to early summer in Central Florida. Hot & humid! Sales have been steady if not spectacular. **Silver Age Marvel and DC** still lead the way. The lower grade books sell well while the more expensive high-grade copies have a problem finding a home due to higher cost—most collectors simply cannot afford books in the $1000 and up range. Those that are purchasing books in the $1000 and up range are buying those silly **slabbed** copies. There is no question that for the time being the slabbed books have affected the demand for high end unslabbed comics. The craziness will end. Just like all fads and novelties we will look back at slabbed comic books one day and laugh (although I wonder how many investors will be laughing when they finally realize that they were sold a ridiculous bill of goods). Ah well—there is one born every minute!

As usual we have had to discount certain titles and groups of comics. As I have stated in the past the overall price structure still needs to lower in order to improve across the board sales. That remains the problem with the **2002 Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide**—too many comics are listed at inflated prices that are unobtainable 95% of the time. We sell a very wide variety of pre-1975 comics and mags and it is very clear that the majority of the Overstreet pricing is inflated. Not much new there!

I do applaud the inclusion of the fourth price column to handle comics in the 'very fine' condition. That is a welcome addition. As usual I got quite a chuckle from the numerous 'I have a million dollars to spend' ads from my fellow dealers. Thankfully most of the collecting public is not that stupid. I always enjoy a new edition of the Guide but wish that the prices were more in line with reality.

SILVER AGE 1955-1969: Marvels in the good to very good range moved well this month. Amazing Spider-Man, Avengers, Journey into Mystery and Tales to Astonish sold well. We were also able to purchase a 1960s Marvel collection that included every super hero book from late 1961 to 1972. A lower grade group that will help to fill out our Marvel selection. DC books sell in spurts. One week Showcase will move, the next week it will be another title. Overall DC sales are decent but a

bit behind Marvel this month. Charlton, Gold Key, Harvey and other similar brands are slow as usual.

Sales: Tales of Suspense #48 VG $50; Amazing Spider-Man #9 VG $150, #14 GD $125; Fantastic Four #12 VG $300; Batman #107 GD $25; Strange Tales #45 VG $40; Detective #230 VG $80.

GOLDEN AGE 1935-1955: Quiet this month. We picked up a run of early World's Finest but that was about it. Most collectors cannot afford the better Golden Age comics. Demand was light this month. I am seeing more and more restored books from this period. We really need to address this issue with a price listing and general information in the 2003 **Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide**. Not all books would be listed—lets start with key popular issues and go from there. The time has come. Too bad the 2002 Guide has no price lists for restored comics.

Sales: Batman #36 GD $150; Police #60 VG $45; Worlds Finest #8 VG $150; Superman #13 VG $450; Action #19 VF $1850; Four Color #108 VG $100.

ART, TOYS & DISNEYANA: Demand continues for 1960s TV and comic character toys. We do not see as much of this material as we could use. We did get in the 1965 Batman Aurora model kit in the box. One of my customers purchased original comic book art from the Dell comic Disney's Davy Crockett from 1955. It was great to see that some of these pages exist. I thought since I had not seen any over the past 40 years they had all been shredded at the Western warehouse. Not so! Hopefully he will swap me a couple pages! We did pick up some nice Win Mortimer newspaper strip pages.

Sales: Robin Aurora kit in box $150; Disneyland 1962 guidebook $30; Flintstones Dino cel $50; Dr. Evil doll in box $400.

That will wrap up our month. Stop by and say hello when visiting Florida!

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One word seems to sum up the current comic market quite well: **GROWTH!** According to most, "Free Comics Day" was a huge success; and perfectly timed, with the release of the mega-blockbuster **Spider-Man motion-picture**. I still wish Marvel had included a mention at the end of the film along the lines of "Don't forget to follow Spidey's adventures in his regular appearances in the comic-books," but I know that's hoping for too much. At least most viewers know that Spidey is a comic-character, while much of the public has no idea that such films as Blade, The Crow, Men In Black, and others were also based on comics. If only we could get more cross-promotion going on, to direct the millions of movie-goers into the comics shops, I think it would help bring the medium back into mainstream culture.

In my childhood, everyone knew about comics, and most youths (males, at least) read them. These days, I sometimes tell people that I deal in comics and get replies such as: "Oh, they still make them?"! However, the modern comic market is certainly showing signs of **renewed strength** and steady growth, so it's still much better off than it was throughout the late nineties.

The latest **Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide** just came out, and I am pleased that it includes the "VF" prices now. It makes pricing much easier, as fewer calculations are required, and certainly helps as a reminder to the novices that there are big price differences even between such nice copies as VFs and NMs! Of course, the NM 9.4 values are only applicable to **UN-slabbed** copies, as those in the pretty blue-label adorned cases typically command at least triple the listed value, if they are indeed in 9.4—and you may want to take out a home-equity loan if the vintage comic is a CGC 9.6 or higher. But, multiples of Guide on true NM books has long been a given—it's just that much easier now, once the arguments and dickering over the grading is pre-resolved!

I particularly like the "Big, Big" **spiral-bound edition**. No more losing your place or breaking the spine trying to get the book to stay open while flipping through a box; and the bigger print makes it actually possible to read the data without having to pick it up each time and losing your place in the run of books you were flipping through! In the past, pages would always start falling out of my price guides after about nine months of frequent referencing—now, the spiral bound format should prevent such maladies!

As expected, the major **Spider-Man movie** has increased demand for Spidey comics. Even the "colder" issues are finding new homes, and the hottest issues sell instantly, even at well above the latest Overstreet values, and often even in the more common low and mid-grades!

Here's some examples of **recent sales** of unslabbed copies: Amazing Spider-Man #37 VG $50, #40 VG $100, #42 VG+ $40, #49 FN $50, #50 VG+ $80, #54 FN $40, #62 FN $36, #81 NM- $51, #96 VF/NM $100, #97 NM- $153, #98 VF- $70, #100 FN/VF $140, #101 NM- $160, #102 NM- $150, #104 VF/NM $50, #110 VF/NM $46, #121 VG/FN $80, #122 VG+ $70, #137 VF/NM $50, #194 NM $25.

In addition, most major **mutant** titles remain hot, such as the key issues of course, but also the bigger runs, such as the first 200 X-Men, and the Wolverine & Origin titles. (Lately we sold a Wolverine Ltd Series #1 in CGC NM+ 9.6 for $100, and a copy of

Wolverine #10 in CGC NM/MT 9.8 with white pages commanded $150!)

Sales of DC cover production art from the **Jack Adler Collection** continue to strengthen, exceeding expectations. All genres are finding healthy interest, not just the staple sellers.

Here's just a small sampling of some **Adler sales** from the last few weeks: Action #436 Hand-colored Cover $250; Adventure #371 Approval Cover $150, #379 Approval Cover $140; Kamandi #4 Approval Cover $150; Falling In Love #133 Hand-colored Cover $135; Girls' Love #162 Hand-colored Cover $115; Our Army At War #269 Hand-colored Cover $150; Secret Hearts #142 Hand-colored Cover $130; Young Love #111 Hand-colored Cover $135; Young Romance #200 Hand-colored Cover $135.

Note: All prices listed are without the shipping/insurance added in. We get frequent requests from fans looking for art to a favorite issue, but all too often we have to turn them away, as many of the hotter and key-issues are already sold, likely to never see the light of day again. I expect this market to enjoy continued growth. It is a thrilling time to be in the hobby. So here's looking forward to an exciting and prosperous summer convention season. Happy collecting!

Joe Serpico
Classic Comic Investments

The **Wizard Philadelphia con** has come and gone. I saw the [Spider-Man] movie the first day, and attended the con on Sunday, Mothers Day, since my mom and spouse were out of town. Also, the Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide finally came out!

The movie was one of the top five super-hero movies ever. The momentum should continue to manifest itself in very high prices for **Spider-Man comics** and related memorabilia for the remainder of the year. As of now, the market for **Spider-man comics**, which was already extremely robust, has reached unbelievable levels of demand and price. It reminds me of the Batman craze in 1989. I went that Friday, opening day, to the 4 o'clock showing. The theatre was packed, and the anticipation and excitement among those in line was almost palpable. After the movie, many stated they were going to see it again, myself included. To say that this will continue to be a franchise that will thrive for many years to come is a no-brainer

This should help restore the character to his former glory, after many years of a noticeable decline. The recent comics have also certainly done their part in this area. All combined, it seems like a great opportunity for anyone who owns any Spider-Man merchandise. I must offer kudos to the owners of Toy-biz, along with the editors at Marvel, for doing such a wonderful job in turning this around. We all benefit from this resurgence.

For example, I was on eBay yesterday, and some of the prices that I have seen some CGC high grade Spider-Mans selling for are downright amazing. Ditko and Romita, and even Kane Spider-Man artwork? I don't even want to go there. Suffice it to say that at present, anyone owning high grade comics or early art work can just about name their price. Hope they enjoy their new homes, or luxury cars!

The Philly con attendance was about as expected—meaning it was very good. I have mixed feelings about Wizard, but they always do a fantastic job in promoting their shows. I was not an attending dealer, but did get around and spoke to many. ALL said that they were very pleased with the sales, and activity. The usual suspects were the same, high grade CGCs from almost all eras and genres, unslabbed low grade reading copies—of which one Chicago dealer had a very impressive run. After purchasing some from him, it was great to kick back and just be able to read these puppies without fear of losing thousands of dollars in equity.

Also, any Atomic Age sci-fi and horror comics were still selling well at the con, but not quite as hot as in the recent past. Also selling briskly were Archies, many romance comics and comics that were previously ignored in the past, such as minor publishers from the Silver and Bronze Ages. I have observed that many Bronze Age comics are turning out to be more rare in high grade than previously believed. They will prove to be a good investment in the mid to long term. The dealers whom I solicited in Philly are finding it tough to replace their books, and therefore are charging higher and ever higher multiples of Guide for their better material. It may be that the spread will one day be 15-20 to 1 for Good to NM or NM+.

While we are on this subject, the **Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide** always does a wonderful job, and it is usually one of the highlights of my collecting year. I believe though, that the Guide is a little too conservative lately in its pricing of the truly scarce and/or high demand issues, as there is no way anyone is going to be able to purchase a true NM Action #1 for $350,000 to $400,000. If anybody wants to sell me one, at that price I will take as many as they can supply. I think that as the hobby has become more fragmented and segmented, the Guide needs to take a more individual approach to the way they price some books, in relation to others, and in regard to price ratios. I realize this is a very time consuming chore, but it would reflect the market in a more accurate manner. I love the **Big, Big Guide**! Great idea. I wish the leather bound edition would come back—they looked impressive on a bookshelf.

Summertime is here, and the living is easy. I have always enjoyed summer as

the most enjoyable season to collect, trade, buy, read and kibbitz comics. Maybe it reminds me of when I was a kid growing up in NYC, and I would come home with eight comics and 4¢ change from my dollar. I would spend a lazy afternoon on my porch, drinking lemonade, eating sandwiches, and getting lost for a few hours in the fantasy world of the comics.

Here are some **recent sales** (all books are CGC unless noted): Fantastic Four #50 8.5 $203; Flash #139 8.5 $100; Fantastic Four #97 9.2 $81; Green Lantern #33 9.2 $179, #18 9.0 $177; Fight Comics #42 9.2 $197; Flash #201 9.2 $54; Godzilla #1 9.8 $73; Conan #18 9.2 $46; Action #331 9.0 $39; Batman #232 8.5 $111; Avengers #16 8.5 $100; Adventure #229 7.5 $92, #335 9.4 $222; Amazing Spider-man #5 7.5 $790; JLA #35 9.2 $111; Showcase #91 7.5 $11; Superman #119 8.0 $147, #200 9.2 $67; Superboy #186 9.2 $34; TOS #19 5.5 $50; Wonder Woman #207 9.0 $41; Detective #282, 8.0, $73, #370 9.2 $65; Nick Fury #7 9.2 $56; Lois Lane #112 9.4 $57; Brave and the Bold #4, 6.5, $178, #83 9.4 $144; Batman Annual #2 7.5 $245; Flash #205 9.6 $159; Hulk #154 9.6 $97; Jimmy Olsen #148 9.6 $59; Terrors of the Jungle #8 7.5 $120; Supernatural Thrillers #1 9.4 $56.

Bob Storms
RCSBLAZING@aol.com

If someone asked me about the state of the high-grade convention circuit at the Pittsburgh show I would have said very disappointing. However, the **Wizard East show** quickly changed my perception of the convention market again. What a pleasure it was to see a great show in Philadelphia again. This show reminded me of the old ComicFest show before a promoter I won't give the benefit of naming destroyed the show. What amazed me was why people won't buy a $25 book out of my high-grade inventory boxes with a 15% discount—yet they'll buy the same book out of a $20 box?

CGC sales continue to be strong at shows and mail order. Let me state this to many of you who quote me what the book sold on eBay when making me offers for books. Ebay does not represent the "whole market," it is another place to sell books. As a seller I now have the ability to sell to collectors, consign to three well run auction houses, set up at shows and put books up on eBay. When a book fails to hit my reserve, it does not mean the book can't sell at my reserve so please don't get mad if I don't agree with the statement "It was only bid up to $$$ so that's what it must be worth."

It is also becoming more and more difficult to find early **high grade** Marvels and DCs. The convention floor before the show opens up to the public has become extremely competitive. While the Philly show was a great selling show, there was not much in the way of high grade 1962-1964 high-grade material.

Dealers with high-grade material are in many cases pricing the books as if they were already graded. That's ok only if the premium being paid matches the grade you get if you send it in.

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We got the list of items in stock listed on-line in early May, on our website. Given that we listed 95% of all comics printed by all publishers from 1960-2001 and 25% of all 1950s comics, what do you think sold the best? If your answer was Hulk #181, you were wrong! (Only one request for #181.) The **most requested** and best selling items in order of demand and volume sold were: (1) Archie digests; (2) 1940s/'50s western comics; (3) DC war comics; (4) Charlton horror & war; (5) Katy Keene & Archie comics; (6) assorted Dell comics; (7) Bronze Age Marvel, mostly super hero; (8) Dennis the Menace comics & digests; (9) Spire Christian comics; (10) CGC graded comics; (11) assorted Classic Illustrated specials and imitators; (12) assorted DC comics; (13) assorted alternative comics from 1980s/'90s.

We were swamped with orders and want lists. It was so busy we were only slowed by having to get sleep and food and the inevitable washroom excursions. It just goes to show that there are 100s and 1000s of buyers out there who still **love comics** for what they are and don't give a hang about investment. I love dealing with these types of grass roots collectors, and still maintain they are the backbone of our beloved hobby. I am a fanatical comics fan and collector myself since 1964 and understand where they are coming from. Still, about 95% of our sales volume remains GD to FN range items, in the $2 to $20 price range! This is our bread and butter, and one of the most underestimated groups of buyers by the more elitist dealers.

When I first saw the very late new **Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide**, I did not initially like the changes, especially the added VF column and rounded dollar figures with no cents or decimals. But having already used it quite a bit, it has grown fast and I now like and prefer it. I applaud Bob for the needed changes. Weird Vampire Tales is finally listed for the first time ever, but it is annoying to see that the sister title Terrors of Dracula is still not

listed, even though I submitted all the necessary info. It is also nice to see the 700+ issue series "Sunday Pix" finally listed for the first time.

Recent sales: All New Collectors Edition DC #C56 VF $45; All New Collectors Edition Whitman #C56 VG $30; All Surprise #1 FA $22; Anomaly (Fanzine) #3 FN $35; Archie Comics Digest #1 VG $50; Comedy Comics #14 FA $42; Conan #3 FN $45; Dennis the Menace #143 VG $15; Eerie (Warren) #8 FN $17; Fightin' Marines (1951) #15 GD $69, #17 (1954) VG $29; Foom #1 VF $50; Hobbit set #1-3 NM $49; Katy Keene #52 G $22; Katy Keene #54 G $22; Katy Keene Comics Digest Mag #1 VF $12; Katy Keene Pinup Parade #9 VG $49, #13 VG $36, #15 VG $100; King mag (Skywald) #1 G $30, #2 GD $20; Lady Bountiful (1917) #195 VG $120, (1917) #195 GD $95; Limited Collectors Edition #C39 VF $20, #C41 VF $20; MAD #1 VG+ $1400, #2 FN+ $650, #6 VG+ $160, #17 FN+ $200; Mystery Comics Digest #1 FN $25; Nightmare (Skywald) #20 FN $45; Our Army at War #1 VG $320, #4 VG $99, #6 VG $85, #14 VG $69; Ozzie & Harriet #5 FA $35; Psycho #1 VF $36; Scream #11 GD $10; Soap Opera Love #3 VF $20; Sonic the Hedgehog Mini #0 VF $25, #1 VF $25, #2 VF $20; Sonic the Hedgehog Ongoing series #1 VF $25; Star Spangled War Stories #131 (#1) VG+ $250, #10 VG $55, #15 VG $45; Strange Adventures #91 VF $110; Sunday Pix with Peanuts V12 #20 VF $50; Supergirl #1 VF $27; Super Rabbit #6 FN $70; Terrytoons (Timely) #3 FA $29; Turok #1 GD $69, #2 VG $69, #10 VG $32; Vicki #4 GD $10; Weird Organic Tales (1981) #1 FN $10.

Gary Dolgoff Comics
116 Pleasant Street #2235
Easthampton, MA 01027

Tell ya, I'm very happy with the way that comics from the '60s and '70s are moving—in all grades! I really believe that tight grading wins the day. Make 'em happy and they'll come back—again and again! In February, I got in over 100,000 **'60s and '70s comics** (mostly DCs and Marvels). Some of the highlights were 4-6 copies each of the major Marvel #1s (AF #15, Spidey #1, FF #1, etc.) I sold them all for Guide or more. I also sold, at Guide, CGC 8.0 and 8.5 X-Men #1s (1963)—three copies I sold.

I've been selling Silver and Bronze comics quite well; cultivating a diverse happy bunch of buyers of these books, in all grades—high, medium and low. Batmans are probably the best Silver and Gold DC sellers. Of course Spider-Man has been flying, and is just now returning to normal (although, as always, it is a 'superbly strong title'). Folks are starting to 'vigorously' buy Daredevils; aided, no doubt, by the fact that they are pretty inexpensive books to buy and valued 'quite reasonably' in the marketplace. Of course, Golden Age still sells solidly—it's just that Silver and Bronze books are also strong sellers, and there are more Silver and Bronze collections than Golden Age collections out there to buy.

Tom Gordon
Monumental Collectibles
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410-848-0275

Could we be seeing a **"new era"** in the comic market? It seems as if comics are enjoying a major growth overall. The Spider-Man movie opened and within the first week was off to a record box office run! Comics are selling for record prices everywhere! Free Comic Book Day was a huge success for many retail store owners. Modern comics have been selling well and in some cases are selling out the same day they are released.

Platinum Age and **Victorian Age** comics continue to sell well when found. We are seeing some that are bringing in well over the new **2002 Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide**—regardless of grade. These books are nearly impossible to find and they are developing a serious collector base. When looking at the historical importance of this bygone era, these issues are inexpensive when compared to their later counterparts.

Golden Age comics in all grades continue to sell well—regardless of condition. Timelys are impossible to keep in stock. We are seeing people buy more **CGC graded** 9.0-9.4s than in the past. Some have said that for .2 of a grade they would rather buy more books for their money. Restored CGC books continue to sell at a slight discount to their Guide values. It appears that the concept of restoration has a serious bad rap when it comes to our hobby. If one cannot afford an unrestored copy, buying the properly restored book would seem like a smart move. Should a professionally restored book be worth more than an amateur-ly restored book? Some say it should. What do you think?

Modern 1980s TV books sell very well overall. Titles like GI Joe, Thundercats and Transformers are picking up steam in some parts of the country. We are also seeing purchases of 1980s toys picking up steam as those who played with them as children are reacquiring their childhood favorites. It will be interesting to see if the new Masters of the Universe toys make a hit this summer. Until then—see you at the conventions!

Opinions expressed in CBM *"Market Reports" are solely those of the individual dealers and collectors who contribute them. Prices vary by location, date of transaction and other factors.*

[continued from page 10]

the first cover appearance of "Silver Surfer and Galactus."

Mark Squirek

More Galactus watchers

Is Mark Squirek pulling some kind of strange joke!?! A "toga-clad Galactus" whose "strange, hypnotic stare is obviously designed to enslave earthlings and aliens alike!?! Did he even *read Fantastic Four* #48!?! Does he have even a passing acquaintance with Marvel's Silver Age?

For those who weren't there, the fellow sporting the toga is The Watcher, an *FF* recurring guest almost since the beginning and most decidedly a friend of mankind. Not only is he *not* "one big Galactus," he is but a fraction the size of the ravenous planet-eater and looks *nothing* like the big guy! He and everyone else on the cover are staring up and out at the unseen Galactus.

I thought that among other things *CBM* was supposed to be a scholarly treatment of comic history. For such an otherwise quality magazine to so grossly misrepresent the beginning of one of the greatest *FF* sagas ever, as well as the introduction of one of their most powerful enemies (I won't say villain) does both historian and fan a grave disservice.

I am very disappointed.

Mike Rossi
San Diego, CA

Just a few quick items. First, I want to let you know how much I enjoy your publication. And I am sure that I will be one of many thousand fans responding to the article of the "Greatest Comic Book Ever" by Mark Squirek. On the cover of *FF* #48, "The Coming of Galactus" the guy in the toga is The Watcher, not Galactus. Galactus is waaay bigger, and a lot snappier dresser. And although this was a great book, "This Man, This Monster" in *FF*#51, now that was/is the greatest book ever.

In response to your questions concerning comic strip artists/creators for future articles, please do not leave out Chic Young and *Blondie* and E.C. Segar and Popeye.

Please keep up the excellent work. Your changes in content have been great, and the addition of the "Collectable Statues" has been very much welcomed. After reading about the statues in the past few issues, I went out and bought a few. I never would have taken that step, but after reading about the collectability of these gems, I was glad I did. It has added a new dimension to my comic book hobby. Thank you.

Mike Reichart, via e-mail

Regarding Mark Squirek's review of *FF* #48 in *CBM* #92, that's The Watcher on the cover of the mag, not Galactus. I'll say no more as I am sure he is somewhat embarrassed.

Todd Kvamme
Los Gatos, CA

Okay, so in the first line of his "Greatest Comic Book Ever" piece, Mark Squirek mistakenly refers to DC's Guardians of the Universe as (Marvel's) "The Guardians of the Galaxy." No big deal, I bet even Charlie-27 probably misspoke his team affiliation from time to time. Mr. Squirek then goes on to rhapsodize about the justly-rhapsodized *Fantastic Four* #48, going on for two whole paragraphs about "the giant toga-clad Galactus on the cover" with his "strange, hypnotic stare...obviously designed to enslave earthlings and aliens alike...he is just one big Galactus!!"

Just one small problem with this: *it ain't Galactus*. The figure on the cover is the Watcher, announcing the *coming* of Galactus. As Uatu himself might say: Duh.

It's a little mind-boggling to contemplate how anyone who has actually read *FF* #48—much less considers it the best comic book ever!—could possibly mistake the big bald dude in the toga for the guy in the purple headgear who eats planets. Perhaps Mr. Squirek was just having a psychotic break that day, as we all do from time to time. But what bothers me about this is that it is sadly typical of some of the articles in *CBM*, which seem not to have even been read by the staff, much less edited. I enjoy a great deal of *CBM*, particularly R.C. Harvey's column, but stuff like this just looks slapdash and amateurish: fanboy blather that can't even get its facts straight. Someone please euthanise this column, and put the page to some better use.

Alan Brennert
via e-mail

Had to write on *CBM* 92's "The Greatest Comic Book Ever!" article by Mark Squirek. Calling The Watcher Galactus? *The Fantastic Four* is "The World's Greatest Comic Magazine!" and this could qualify as "The World's Greatest Comic Mistake!" I am still going to keep buying and reading, but have submissions proofread better, please!

Kevin Affolder

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INSPIRATION CENTRAL: RON FRENZ

[continued from page 62]

when I discovered his comics work, [well,] I just think he's a genius.

This *Mr. Right* book I did for Image brought out a lot of my influences. George Tuska I thought was always wonderful. Nick Cardy was a guy that, when I discovered him, it just made me want to do this for a living, along with John Romita, Sr. If you look at *Mr. Right*, even graphically, if you just look at the way the characters are designed you'll see Kirby, you'll see Tuska, you'll see Buscema, you'll see Toth, you'll see Hanna-Barbera. Just different influences from my life.

Frenz-Olliffe-Wolak

I grew up on *Lost in Space*, *Star Trek*, and George Reeves as Superman, Guy Williams as Zorro, and [as Will Robinson, Sr.] in *Lost in Space*. You know, George Reeves or Guy Williams could have played *Mr. Right*. Now, the only person I can think of, contemporary, who could play *Mr. Right* would be like The Rock. Dwayne Johnson, the guy who plays The Rock. But, when I hear Mr. Right's voice in my head, it's Guy Williams, it's George Reeves. It's these guys who played these larger than life heroes that really made an impression on me and, to this day, make me feel like the eight-year-old when I originally saw this stuff.

And that's kind of what we were going for in *Mr. Right*. It hails back to those days. I think older readers can enjoy it because it's very Simon and Kirby, and they'll understand the language, and they'll understand what we're hailing back to. But I think kids will like it because it's very contemporary. It has an eleven-year-old star—which comes from another one of my major influences, Doug Wildey's *Jonny Quest*. I mean, I just love that stuff. So *Mr. Right* has bits and pieces of everything I've always loved, kind of boiled down and processed, in something that's gonna feel, hopefully, new and fresh. But it's definitely a trip through my tortured soul, and my cobwebbed brain, as far as [my artistic] influences are concerned.

Inks by Brett Breeding

THE GREATEST COMIC BOOK EVER

[continued from page 63]

Closer inspection of the panel shows that he is not only running from Robin, but also from one of those symbols of fifties conformity, a white-coated hospital orderly.

Batman is NUTS!

If you go straight to that story on page 69, the splash page has Batman presiding over a meeting of Gotham's finest thugs. He is seated in The Joker's throne at the head of the table. Now, this is the great part. On top of the table is Robin. Batman is prodding him with a spear and with the same maniacal grin as he sports on the cover, he is yelling at the Boy Wonder "C'mon you little punk—DANCE!"

The story has a couple of great Giant Props that were so prevalent during the Fifties Batman. The first is a Giant Ink Pen that Batman/Joker uses to rob a Payroll. One of the greatest Giant Props ever constructed is on top of the Acme Magnifying Lens Company. Apparently, the company, with a callous disregard for the lives of thousands of ants below, feels that a Giant Magnifying Glass on top of their building will increase sales. What it really does is give Batman/Joker a platform to expose Batman's secret identity to all of Gotham.

Each story in this Giant is slightly surrealistic. In "Batman, Robot," Robin attempts to cover up Batman's supposed demise by using a realistic robot to fool the Commissioner and all of Gotham. A variation on the theme of switched identities occurs in "Batman, Junior and Robin, Senior." Here "Scientific Wizardry causes an incredible upset when the Boy Wonder becomes the grown up man of the famous team of crime-fighters, and the great Batman his Boy Partner." From fantastical costumes to Giant Props, there is nothing like a good Dick Sprang Fifties Batman story to brighten up your day.

What set me reeling was that this 80-Page Giant, according to the index page, is actually the second collection of the strange lives of Batman. Finding the first collection became a priority. As a matter of fact, finding every 80-Page Giant became a priority. Thanks to a real lazy paperboy in my suburban Cleveland neighborhood, I was able to acquire several Superman 80-Page Giants as well as a Flash 80-pager that had a great story from the Golden Age. All I had to do to get these handsome volumes of DC lore was rise at 5:30 am and makes sure the 47 houses that stretched out two miles each way to the County line got their copies of the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* in perfect condition.

DC has occasionally reprinted the 80-Page Giants. If you haven't seen these, make the effort to find the recent reprints of the 80-Page Secret Origins along with its sequel, More Secret Origins. They are part of the best bargains ever printed in the Comics Universe.

Did I leave out how much Dick Sprang made me love comics?

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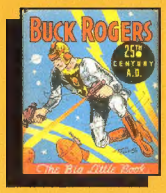

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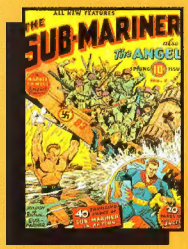

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Auction Prices

Here, we'll let you know everything that's happening in the auction world - from upcoming shows to results of recent shows to profiles of the biggest items up for grabs. We'll also cover prices... both the record breakers and those that are just too astounding not to be recognized.

Industry News

This section will fill you in on all the important goings-on in the comic and collecting industries.

Superstars

In this section, we'll focus on the people making news. Birthdays, anniversaries, promotions, weddings . . . if it has a human interest, we'll highlight it here.

The Main Event

This is where you'll find your new feature articles. These are the lead stories that get to the heart of current trends and sizzling news.

Catch the Wave

Here we'll focus on new products that any savvy collector would find of interest. They might not be trends yet, but keep alert! If it's new and different, this is the place to explore it.

Did You Know...?

This is the section for the lover of nostalgia - particularly obscure nostalgia. We'll report on the toys, characters, clubs and other things that had their hey-day, disappeared for a while, and are finally regaining popularity.

In the Limelight

In this section, we'll give an in-depth profile of a Star Collector.

Mondo Media

Here we'll give you up-to-the-minute box-office wrap-ups, trivia, and features from the movie, TV, radio and journalism worlds.

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